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LIFETIME

March 2023

UNPLUG to RECHARGE

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and more on being mindful with tech in our modern world. *p. 16*



THE GREAT DIGITAL DECLUTTER

A 30-DAY PLAN FOR
RESETTING YOUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH
YOUR DEVICES

p. 50

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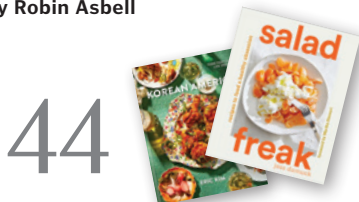
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HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE

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



I decided to shush that taskmaster in my head, let go of any lingering guilt, and just enjoy my experience.”

YOUR THOUGHTS?

Email us at experiencelife@experiencelife.com.

Real Presence

On one of the final days of wrapping up this issue, I stepped away for some self-care. The *Experience Life* team had given me the generous gift of a spa treatment for my recent milestone birthday, and I had made an appointment for what was supposed to be a quiet Friday afternoon.

Alas, a shift in work deadlines meant the day wasn't as free as I anticipated, and I considered rescheduling. *You should cancel*, one voice in my head said. *The team will be waiting on you if you go*.

No, another voice said, *it will be OK. There's still time to finish things up, and they'll understand*.

The latter voice won out, and it was OK. As I settled in for my treatment, I realized I was acting on the theme of this issue: unplugging to recharge, even if only for a couple of hours. So, I decided to shush that taskmaster in my head, let go of any lingering guilt, and just enjoy my experience.

It turns out I was prioritizing a form of habitual recovery, which LT Mind performance coaches Barbara Powell, MA, and Brie Vortherms, MA, LMFT, describe in a recent *Life Time Talks* podcast episode as “things we do for ourselves regularly to make sure we have the mental and physical energy to take on whatever stressors we might encounter.”

Getting a spa treatment is not something I do every day, but a few times a year, it's a great tool for helping me reset. (For more on three types of recovery, and why they each matter, see “The Trials and Tribulations of the Everyday Athlete,” on page 56, or listen to the “What's Self-Care, Really?” podcast episode at ELmag.com/lttalks.)

As I left that appointment and veered back into work mode, I felt renewed, as well as motivated to find *more* ways to unplug and reconnect — not only with my body, but also with the people, places, and things I love. While reviewing these pages, I found plenty of ideas for making that happen:

- **“No Distractions”**: I downloaded Ryan Frankel's *This App Saves Lives* and have put it to work as I keep my eyes on the road (see page 22).

- **“Cook With Books”**: Food editor Kaelyn Riley's influence led me to open a homemade family cookbook and make my grandma's banana bread. I also pulled out my copy of *Better Homes and Gardens New Cook Book: 75th Anniversary Edition* and made a surprisingly simple chicken marsala that was tastier than any creation I've tried from Pinterest (see page 44).

- **“The Great Digital Declutter”**: This feature inspired me to declutter and reorganize my phone. I spent a couple of hours one morning deleting unused and unnecessary apps, creating clear categories for those that remained, and moving “optional” apps to secondary screens. My next step is to set my standard operating procedures and attempt the 30-day break (see page 50).

- **“Simple Ways to Improve Connection”**: I love the concept of embracing micromoments, and I've been trying to connect more intentionally with all sorts of people in my daily life, including coffee-shop baristas, grocery-store clerks, the parents of the kids on the youth basketball team I coach, and my colleagues, friends, and family (see page 70).

These types of efforts are relatively effortless, yet they have the potential to bring so much value to our daily experiences. Whether it's cooking a meal, truly tuning in during a commute, or simply setting our phones aside more often, the here-and-now presence of mind and body reconnects us with the things that matter most — our people, our communities, and this big, beautiful world we all share.

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



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Talk to Us



PRIMA BALLERINA

I have had the honor and privilege of watching Misty Copeland's beautiful and poised balletic performances on various television programs over the years ("Principal Views," November 2022). What an example she's proven to be to other dancers, with her teaching and mentoring of younger generations who otherwise would never have been given the opportunity to show their talents and love for ballet.

Vicki C.

MOVEMENT INSPIRATION

This is an excellent article ("Split Training," November 2022). I'm a Masters runner who includes strength training and body-weight and mobility exercises weekly. The "split" program you describe (with good photos!) has been the routine that works best for me.

Barb B.

We are constantly trying to get the idea that exercise is key to longevity out to our communities across Alabama ("Can Exercise Help Me Live Longer?," October 2022). If we have learned anything over the past couple of years, we know that exercise is vital to living life to the fullest. We run school and community fitness events as well as Alabama Senior

Olympics for people 50 and older, and we hear stories all the time about seniors taking up a sport for the first time in their 50s, 60s, 70s, and even 80s, and how it has added years and energy to their lives.

Phil H.

Good advice and timely, too ("The TRX Pull-Up," October 2022). The assisted pull-up machine at my club is out of order, but they do have TRX equipment.

@digging_the_woodlands

SYSTEMIC TOXICITY

Sadly, too many toxic relationships are between doctor and patient ("How to Cope With a Toxic Friend," October 2022). It's like the system is set up for it or something.

Shay S.

Our article "The Empowered Patient" (March 2015) offers helpful strategies for navigating tricky doctor-patient dynamics. You can read it at ELmag.com/empoweredpatient.

ON FIBER — AND POSTWORKOUT FUEL

My doctor suggested I go on a cholesterol medication, so I pulled up your article and started eating more soluble fiber ("Fiber: Why It Matters More Than You Think," April 2020). Within one and a half months,

my cholesterol dropped from about 200 to 170! I wish I'd known about this long ago.

David M.

These energy bites are my favorite postworkout food ("Get Your Glow On," April 2022). After a 50-minute morning cycle class, I always feel satisfied after eating just two energy bites. They are the perfect blend of protein, fat, and fuel (coffee!) to keep me going until mealtime. Thanks, Chef Dodge, for creating such a perfect little bite!

Jeanne T.

ALCOHOL AND AFIB

I think the pandemic resulted in a lot more drinking, as people were shut inside ("5 Tips to Stay Sober," October 2022). Over the last four years or so, I've normally had beer or wine with dinner. However, I noticed that even one to two drinks per night left me sleepy, and I did not get as much accomplished later in the evening.

I also have developed paroxysmal atrial fibrillation (AFib) that is exercise induced. I read in a recent article that even moderate drinking — two drinks per night — can irritate the heart and increase the likelihood of AFib. So, I am going alcohol-free for a month to see if I can accomplish more in the evenings and have fewer experiences of AFib.

I started thinking about doing this because my son does alcohol-free October every year, and it seems like a great idea.

Bruce H.

MASSAGE FOR BODY AND MIND

Catherine Guthrie has written a well-crafted, thoughtful article about the many benefits of massage therapy and how therapeutic massage can enhance

your life ("How Massage Can Heal the Body and Mind," January/February 2020). I was grateful to see a list of various massage modalities, paragraphs on multiple ways that therapeutic massage can benefit a person's life, and a guide to selecting a massage therapist best suited for an individual's lifestyle and fitness goals.

I have been in the massage profession for 40 years as a licensed massage therapist and as a massage-therapy instructor. It was heartwarming to read an article that embraces massage as an important component of good health for both the body and the mind. I'm going to schedule a massage session right now. I hope you do, too!

Ariana V.



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Letters to the Editor

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Got the Blues?

Ultraprocessed Food May Be to Blame

There are any number of reasons we may struggle from time to time with depression, anxiety, and other mental-health conditions, but researchers at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) believe we may be overlooking a not-so-obvious culprit: the typical American diet.

By some estimates, ultraprocessed foods — industrial formulations of oils, fats, sugars, starches, protein isolates, and other substances — account for nearly 60 percent of the average American's daily caloric intake. The results of a recent FAU study suggest that these products may trigger neurological changes that can lead to harmful mood shifts.

Earlier research had established a link between junk-food consumption and depression, but lead study author Eric Hecht, MD, PhD, wanted to determine whether a steady diet of ultraprocessed fare could result in a wider range of psychological troubles.

Hecht's team analyzed data collected from 10,359 participants by the U.S. National Health and Nutrition

Examination Survey and adjusted for numerous sociodemographic variables. They then measured incidences of mild depression and anxiety as well as “mentally unhealthy days” reported by respondents between 2007 and 2012.

Their results, published in the journal *Public Health Nutrition*, suggest a strong link between a junk-food diet and mental-health struggles.

“Individuals reporting higher intakes of ultraprocessed foods were significantly

more likely to report mild depression, more mentally unhealthy and more anxious days, and less likely to report zero mentally unhealthy or anxious days,” Hecht concludes. “These data add important information to a growing body of evidence concerning the potential adverse effects of ultraprocessed-food consumption on mental health.”

Lacking essential nutrients and often packed with sugar, these

products typically rank high on the glycemic index. Hecht points to animal studies suggesting that such fare can damage the brain's ability to regulate insulin, potentially dampening mood.

These foods can reduce levels of serotonin (associated with feelings of happiness) and dopamine (rewards) in the brain while sparking neuro-inflammation. The gut microbiome may also be damaged, triggering a systemic inflammatory flare-up that may affect brain function.

More research is needed, Hecht says; the data he and his team analyzed was self-reported. But

their conclusions bolster those of earlier studies about the damaging effects of ultraprocessed food and send a strong message to the millions of Americans entrenched in a junk-food diet.

“Since ultraprocessed foods represent the majority of calories consumed by the U.S. population, these data may also have significant clinical and public-health implications,” he says.

— CRAIG COX

71%

Percentage of packaged foods in the United States classified as ultraprocessed.

57%

Percentage of calories consumed daily by the average American that come from ultraprocessed foods.

The Stethoscope of the Future

During a typical exam, healthcare professionals rely on several separate diagnostic measurements to assess a patient's health, including blood pressure, body temperature, and heart rate. Some progressive practitioners are beginning to consider another type of measurement to help them make sense of perplexing symptoms: autonomic nervous system (ANS) testing.

The ANS controls involuntary biological functions, such as the beating of the heart; widening and constricting of blood vessels; respiration; and digestion. ANS tests measure how well two divisions of the system — the sympathetic and parasympathetic — are working together. They provide a more comprehensive view of patient health than individual biomarkers do, explains functional-medicine practitioner Gregory Plotnikoff, MD, MTS, FACP.

Dysregulation of the ANS can reflect underlying disease and cause symptoms of its own, says Plotnikoff. "Lack of coordination between parasympathetic and sympathetic branches, as well as imbalance or excess of either, can drive numerous perplexing symptoms and can represent significant health risks themselves."

The ability to assess the state of the ANS isn't new, but until now medical modalities that produce an accurate, comprehensive picture of its coordination and function have been cumbersome, expensive, and often invasive. (Wearable consumer devices that test ANS coordination via measurements like heart-rate variability, or HRV, provide insight but are not diagnostic.)

Plotnikoff — whose practice serves patients with complex illnesses that have eluded successful diagnoses or treatments — uses ANS testing early in the diagnostic process with every new patient.

"ANS testing makes the invisible visible," he says, and that enables him to focus attention on what might underlie disabling symptoms. It can help identify optimal therapies for people with a host of conditions, including type 2 diabetes, hypertension, previous heart attacks or heart surgeries, anxiety and depression, migraines and seizures, gastrointestinal disturbances, and even long COVID.

During the 15-minute assessment, specialized monitoring technology with a blood-pressure cuff, electrodes, pulse oximeter, and temperature sensor measures average heart rate, blood pressure, blood oxygen saturation, and body temperature with the patient at rest and in various states of physiological stress: while breathing deeply; performing a heart-straining breath technique called the Valsalva maneuver; and standing for five minutes. The system then uses an algorithm to calculate sympathetic and parasympathetic activity, which the practitioner interprets.

ANS testing technologies like the system Plotnikoff uses are not yet in widespread use. It's similar to the early days of MRI, he explains, when physicians weren't trained in the technology or its application, and it was prohibitively expensive for most practices.

"It's far on the horizon, but I predict this will someday be part of the annual exam — it's the stethoscope of the future."

— JILL PATTON, FMCHC



Reading Your Sweat

Sweating is a human superpower.

Perspiration is part of the body's thermostat and keeps us from overheating. We can't survive without it.

As we perspire, we lose water and electrolytes — those electrically charged essential minerals (including sodium, potassium, and calcium) that are key to energy production, muscle contractions, and our body's overall function.

Exercisers know that if you lose too much water and electrolytes, your performance suffers. A new-tech sweat patch and corresponding app can help you "read" your perspiration and receive targeted recommendations about hydration and nutrition.

Epicore Biosystems has engineered the Gx Sweat Patch under the Gatorade brand. It includes a single-use Band-Aid-like patch for your arm: You work out, sweat, and then scan the patch with your phone. The app tracks your sweat rate, fluid loss, and sodium levels to advise you on hydration — which could improve performance and help exercisers avoid muscle cramps or heatstroke.

In the future, developers hope such patches will be able to track stress hormones and other sweat components as well.

— MICHAEL DREGNI



The Role of Exercise in Strengthening Your Immune System

Folk wisdom has long stated that exercise will reduce your chances of getting sick. But is that true? Two recent reports say, decidedly, yes.

A 2022 meta-analysis of 16 studies in the *BMJ* included more than 1.8 million people around the globe. Researchers found that those who stayed physically active had a lower risk of severe illness from COVID-19 compared with people who were not active.

And a 2021 systematic review of 55 studies in *Sports Medicine* revealed that regular physical exercise boosted the immune system's ability to fight off "community-acquired infectious disease" in general.

These are some of the key findings.

31%

Percent lower risk of contracting "community-acquired infectious disease" — including respiratory-tract infections, such as colds and pneumonia — among those who were habitually physically active. *Sports Medicine* also reported a 37 percent risk reduction in overall infectious-disease mortality.

150

Minimum number of minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week that was found to be of benefit, according to the *BMJ*. Seventy-five minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise produced similar results.

"Regular, moderate to vigorous physical activity is associated with reduced risk of community-acquired infectious diseases and infectious-disease mortality; enhances the first line of defense of the immune system; and increases the potency of vaccination."

— Authors of the *Sports Medicine* meta-analysis

— MD

Just Say No to Children's Screen Time

More than a decade ago, a *New York Times* reporter asked Apple's then-CEO Steve Jobs how his children liked the new iPad. "They haven't used it," Jobs replied. "We limit how much technology our kids use at home." Since then, more Silicon Valley tech execs have voiced similar concerns.

It's perhaps the greatest irony of modern technology: The very people who mastermind some of the world's biggest tech developments limit their own children's screen use, thanks to their understanding of how pernicious their products can be.

These insider quotes may leave you reconsidering your own kids' screen use.

— MD

“**Phones and apps** aren't good or bad by themselves, but for adolescents who don't yet have the emotional tools to navigate life's complications and confusions, they can exacerbate the difficulties of growing up: learning how to be kind, coping with feelings of exclusion, taking advantage of freedom while exercising self-control.”

— Melinda Gates, former developer at Microsoft, cochair and cofounder of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and former wife of Microsoft cofounder Bill Gates, in a 2017 *Washington Post* parenting perspective piece

“**I have times** when I take away all my kids' phones, especially if we're on a family vacation, because I want people to interact with each other. So, I take away their phones and say, 'We're all going to focus on being present today.' It comes back to balance — people need to learn when it is a time [to be] focused in the conversation and when it is OK to go and watch videos or do other activities on the internet.”

— Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube, in a 2019 interview with the *Guardian*

“**My kids accuse me and my wife** of being fascists and overly concerned about tech, and they say that none of their friends have the same rules. That's because we have seen the dangers of technology firsthand. I've seen it in myself; I don't want to see that happen to my kids. . . . On the scale between candy and crack cocaine, it's closer to crack cocaine. . . . We thought we could control it, and this is beyond our power to control. This is going straight to the pleasure centers of the developing brain. This is beyond our capacity as regular parents to understand. I didn't know what we were doing to their brains until I started to observe the symptoms and the consequences.”

— Chris Anderson, former editor of *Wired*, founder of tech blog GeekDad.com, and now CEO of robotics and drone company 3DR, quoted in the *New York Times* in 2014 and 2018

“**The thought process** that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them . . . was all about 'How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?' . . . God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains.”

— Napster cofounder and former Facebook president Sean Parker, speaking at the 2017 Axios conference

“**I am convinced** the devil lives in our phones and is wreaking havoc on our children.”

— Athena Chavarria, former executive assistant at Facebook, quoted in the *New York Times* in 2018

READ MORE

For statements from other tech execs, see [ELmag.com/screentime](https://www.ELmag.com/screentime).



Why Dreams Matter

Dreaming is one of the most universal of all human experiences. Yet for much of the last few decades, dreams have largely been overlooked or minimized in the context of psychological theory and treatment.

This wasn't always the case. In the first half of the 20th century, many psychologists considered dreams to be a window into the psyche, essential to understanding and healing our real-life struggles. Interest waned for some time, but the field is waking up again.

The Dream Reawakening

As the field of neuroscience has grown increasingly sophisticated, with technology enabling scientists to “watch” the brain during sleep, new light has been shed on the form and function of dreams. Researchers have begun to understand the mechanics of dreams and reconsider their utility.

Dreams pull from real-life memories and the very real emotions attached to them — and when we're deeply asleep, we can engage with those memories and emotions in a looser, freer manner. A recent study of brain activity during REM sleep showed activity in regions associated with abstraction, novelty, and creativity, while parts of the brain that regulate logic, decision-making, and impulse control were suppressed.

“[When dreaming], the brain becomes actively biased toward seeking out the most distant, nonobvious links between sets of information,” explains neuroscientist Matthew Walker, PhD, in *Why We Sleep*.

DELVE DEEPER

For a longer version of this article, see ELmag.com/dreams.

Dreams seem to offer a safe place to engage with the difficult feelings we suppress while awake. In this way, dreaming is akin to meeting with a confrontational therapist: You're forced to face whatever you've been avoiding.

This suggests that we can learn to treat our dreams as a source of insight — and maybe even inspiration.

Mining Dreams for Meaning

To find meaning in a dream, you must remember it. Jacquie Lewis, PhD, coauthor of *Working With Dreams and PTSD Nightmares*, offers these tips.

- **Before sleeping, silently repeat** an affirmation reiterating the importance of dreams. Upon waking, spend a few moments lying still, eyes closed, reflecting on the dream. Next, record as much as you can. Don't worry about capturing every detail, but be sure to note evocative images or feelings.

- **Look for connections** between your dream and your real life, focusing on associations and feelings — especially loaded feelings like fear, desire, or disgust — rather than specifics. (Your third-grade gym teacher probably matters less as an individual than as a proxy for authority.)

- **Consider how emotions** evoked in your dream might reflect emotions related to waking-life issues. Lewis suggests asking yourself why the dream may have occurred at this particular time. In doing so, you may identify hopes, fears, or wishes that are unaddressed or unresolved in real life but have “permission” to manifest in your dreams.

- **Try “rewriting” a dream** so that it offers resolution. Then consider how you might translate that revision into your own life: How might you address or resolve unfinished business?

Dreams are highly personal. Sharing those that touch on our deepest hopes, fears, or insecurities can make you feel extremely vulnerable. But if the goal is to mine the dream for insight into real-life struggles, it can be worth eliciting feedback from a close friend or family member who may be able to help you see beyond your blind spots.

Still, remember that dreams are subjective, and that your interpretation — or anyone else's — is just that: an interpretation. What matters is what you make of it. 🗨️

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC

WHY NIGHTMARES ALSO MATTER

Our brains tend to self-regulate when we're dreaming, enabling us to act out emotions that were not expressed or resolved during the day. Nightmares can be so emotionally charged that the self-regulation process breaks down. This is especially true if the nightmares stem from trauma.

Researchers speculate that trauma-related nightmares activate fear-memory structures that were encoded during the real-life traumatic experience. The ensuing emotional distress can generate a physiological panic response — picture bolting up from bed, heart pounding, body drenched in sweat — rendering sleep no longer a space to work through our issues but one in which we relive them, often harrowingly.



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TECH IN BALANCE

Curious to explore different perspectives on keeping tech use in check, we reconnected with five of our past cover-story personalities to ask how they manage it in their own lives.

BY **JILL PATTON, FMCHC**

These days, you'd be hard-pressed to find someone who doesn't have a smartphone — or a smartwatch or tablet or laptop. Even those of us who made it to adulthood without access to the internet have become largely dependent on these devices for communication, entertainment, news and information, creative projects, and education. For those who grew up with tech, the thought of living without it may be difficult to imagine.

For all the benefits of personal technology, it's far too easy to fall into an unhealthy relationship with our screens. We asked several healthy-living advocates about the role of tech in their lives and sought their advice for how to strike a healthy balance.



● TONY GONZALEZ

Since retiring from the NFL in 2013, Tony Gonzalez has offered expert analysis for CBS Sports, Fox Sports, and Amazon. He's been cast in TV and film roles and serves as ambassador for an after-school enrichment program in his community.

But the introverted Hall of Famer struggles to maintain a social-media presence. "It's not a natural thing for me to be like, 'Hey, look at my life right now,'" he says.

Gonzalez doesn't follow much social media but admits he can get lost in YouTube. "I try to use it as a tool as much as I can, meaning I try to learn something from it."

He finds lectures on topics that interest him, including history and philosophy. He watches master classes on acting and does much of his football research on the platform.

Gonzalez also relies on his phone's screen-time summary to let him know whether he's spent more time online than he intends. "You've really got to check yourself and be honest when it's getting out of hand," he says.

The father of four is conscious of modeling healthy tech behavior for his family, as well as setting limits for himself and the kids. "There's so much distraction out there, with everything vying for our attention, so you've got to come up with some hard rules," he says.

His own rules include not using his phone before 8 a.m., after 7 p.m., or at mealtimes, and trying to limit his use during the day. "We need this present moment because otherwise it'll slip away."



● HAILE THOMAS

At 22, wellness activist Haile Thomas has been in the public eye for more than half her life. Inspired by her mother's efforts to transform the family's diet after her father was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, the then-second grader started a YouTube channel to teach kids to cook, and she ultimately launched a nonprofit organization to educate young people about healthy eating.

Cooking demonstrations led to speaking gigs, collaborations on kids' menus, and even multiple meetings with then-First Lady Michelle Obama. But it was Instagram that really raised her profile.

"Especially over the past few years, social media has not only become the staple of my activism, my writing, and my creativity, but an incredible way to connect with others," says Thomas, who has more than 113,000 Instagram followers.

While she believes social media's potential to inspire and bring people together outweighs its pitfalls, she admits that it can be difficult to maintain perspective and positivity in a digital environment.

"Nuance can be erased in online spaces when we forget the wholeness of the human beings behind the screens," she says, noting that it can be easy to fall into the comparison trap when scrolling through the carefully curated content people share to represent themselves online.

To keep herself grounded in real life, Thomas journals daily and occasionally shuns her devices during multiday "digital detoxes."

"I believe there is a way we can develop healthy relationships with technology, and it can support us in doing our work on this planet," she argues. "It can be a wonderful tool, but we have to get in the driver's seat and understand that power."

● ON THE COVER



● SANJAY GUPTA

CNN chief medical correspondent Sanjay Gupta, MD, views the impact of personal technology on our lives through both the wide-angle lens of a journalist and the medical loupe of a trauma neurosurgeon.

“The use of smartphones and social media represents a novel and fundamental change in human sociology,” Gupta says. “Anybody who’s trying to speculate where this all goes is guessing.”

One fascinating, if frightening, facet of this change is personalization and privacy. “It’s quite likely your device knows you better than you know yourself,” he says. “It knows that the last 10 times you were about to make a certain decision — such as whether to pick a window or aisle seat — you made *this* decision. For you, each time feels like you’re making a new decision, but your device could tell you with a great deal of accuracy.”

And although studies link screen time with detrimental health effects like disrupted sleep, decreased physical activity, and increased depression and anxiety, Gupta believes the most urgent concern is the use of these devices while driving.

“The number of patients I see who go from having a normal day to the worst day in their lives because they decided to text while driving blows my mind. Almost nothing else matters in terms of advice if you are still using tech while driving, because that will kill you.”

To protect our privacy *and* keep our impulses in check, Gupta recommends using the settings on our devices. He turns off notifications and has created a “VIP” contact list to let only certain messages ring or buzz through. He has turned off his phone’s voicemail feature, which leaves him one fewer messaging channel to monitor. And he no longer uses his phone as an alarm clock, leaving it in another room while he sleeps.

“We’re going down this road,” he says. “Now it’s mostly about the guardrails.”



● LATHAM THOMAS

As the founder of Mama Glow, a New York City-based company that provides holistic lifestyle support for women from pre-pregnancy through new motherhood, Latham Thomas used to post frequently on social media. She promoted her business, and she also shared content about wellness and her personal life in support of the brand she leads.

“There was a time when I felt it was a responsibility to be on social media,” Thomas recalls. “I felt pressure to use my platform.”

This felt out of alignment with her beliefs about being present to the rhythms of body and mind.

Ironically, this shifted when the pandemic shut down Mama Glow’s in-person doula trainings. Thomas and her team had to find ways to use technology to recreate the deep community and interpersonal connection students needed.

“We found that it was possible to convene in a deeply powerful way,” she says. “It’s not just what’s happening in the room — it’s what’s happening in your heart. You can bring that energy from your heart space to whatever you’re doing, even virtually.”

When in-person gatherings resumed, Thomas found herself using social media more intentionally. Her personal posts have declined from one per day to a handful each month.

“When you put aside your devices, stuff surfaces,” she cautions. “Things you don’t want to deal with, things you need to heal, things you need to get in right relationship with. That’s what many of us fear — that those issues will find their way to the surface. But when you’re present with yourself, healing is possible.”



● JON KABAT-ZINN

The real challenge of this time in history, says Jon Kabat-Zinn, is that we’re analog beings in an increasingly digital world.

“We have the most complicated arrangement of matter in the known universe under the vault of our skull,” the renowned scientist, author, and meditation teacher explains. “It’s the product of 3.5 billion years of evolution — not 50 years of very clever people in Silicon Valley.”

Yet today’s “attention economy” is designed to capture our analog minds for as long as possible, he notes. It primes us to seek out and consume a mix of distracting and enriching entertainment, information and misinformation, unity and division, connection and separation.

“It all boils down to ‘What are you going to pay attention to?’”

Enter mindfulness practice — a time-tested tool for paying attention to what’s carrying your attention away. Even in the storm of digital distraction, there’s always an opportunity to return to the present moment.

“Pre-digital, it wasn’t about cellphones. But now that there are cellphones, laptops, and the internet, these can become the objects of the meditation practice,” he says. Learning to recognize when your devices are pulling you away and to come back to the present, time and time again, builds your capacity to “inhabit the full dimensionality of human awareness.”

Kabat-Zinn remains sanguine about humanity’s ability to find a healthy balance with technology.

“It’s going to take a generation or two for us to figure out how to optimize the benefit and minimize the harm, but ultimately, it’s not the technology that’s going to be the problem,” he argues. “It’s the human mind and heart, and how intimate we are with what we love, our values, and our ethics. And that’s something that’s cultivatable.” 🌱

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

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Avoid Screens at Bedtime

This month's challenge puts time limits on your tech use for better rest at night — and an easier start the next day.

BY **EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF**

WHY

The digital barrage of emails and updates can trigger your body's stress response, putting unnecessary strain on your endocrine and sympathetic nervous systems. Your devices' blue light may also disrupt sleep.

HOW

Aim to turn off your devices one hour before bedtime: Read, write in your journal, take a bath, or practice yoga instead. In the morning, put your phone aside to meditate, take a walk, or mindfully drink your tea or coffee.

TAKE ACTION

Find support for setting better boundaries around your screen time with our collection of resources and tips at [ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit](https://www.ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit).



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No Distractions

One man is inspired to advocate for more attentive driving after being injured in an accident involving a distracted motorist.

BY RYAN FRANKEL



Above: Ryan Frankel on a bike ride in 2015. Inset: The home screen of This App Saves Lives.

I've always believed in starting my mornings with something invigorating. On a warm day in July 2015, this meant hopping on my bike and riding through the streets of New York City. At the time, I was feeling energized. I had a big meeting scheduled later with a CEO who was interested in acquiring my technology startup, VerbalizeIt, which I'd cofounded in 2011.

I was expecting to remember this day as a big moment in my professional life; I never could have predicted that I'd remember it as the day I was nearly hit by a distracted driver — much less that this event would inspire my next business venture.

In the moment, that driver — who I could see was texting — had run a red light and was heading toward me. Luckily, I was able to swerve and avoid a direct collision, but I was thrown over my handlebars. Meanwhile, the driver sped off without stopping; I'm not sure they even knew what had happened.

I was pretty beat up, yet I didn't realize how injured I was. I climbed

on my bike again, but I quickly found that my arm didn't move and my legs weren't functioning properly.

I staggered back to my apartment and took the most painful shower of my life. Then I took a taxi up to Midtown to meet with the CEO.

As soon as he saw me, he turned me around and sent me directly to the hospital. There, I learned the extent of my injuries, which included a fractured hip and elbow.

I was bedridden for a few weeks; that autumn, I started the long process of physical therapy. In all, it took about nine months to get back to my regular activities — too long for my liking, yet long enough to come up with a new business idea.

The Road to Entrepreneurship

I never planned to be an entrepreneur. Ever since I was a kid in Baltimore, I wanted to be a professional baseball player. Many of my childhood memories involve baseball — including participating in spring, summer, and fall leagues and attending Orioles games with my family.

My passion brought me all the way to the college level, where I pitched and played shortstop for Haverford College. Because my body frame is inherently quite lean, I put in a ton of work to bulk up. I trained two to three hours a day, ate well, played other sports (like basketball), and supplemented with protein shakes.

I gave it my all and put in my time, but unfortunately, there's something about being 5 foot 9 and a buck-50 pounds that doesn't excite the scouts. When my goal of going pro didn't pan out, I headed to New York City in 2006 to work as a financial analyst at Goldman Sachs.

Soon after, I discovered a new calling: entrepreneurship. This was partly inspired by my experience at Goldman, where I had the privilege of traveling around the country meeting entrepreneurs and executives. While spending so much time on the road with these CEOs and company founders, I realized that I wanted to be in their shoes.

My background in baseball was also a driving force behind my growing passion. Nothing beats

Ryan's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

KEEP EVERYTHING IN PERSPECTIVE. “My accident could have been a lot worse,” Ryan says. “I’m one of the lucky ones.”

2

SET THE TONE FOR A GREAT DAY. Find the thing that helps you feel invigorated and ready to take on the day, and then find the time to make it happen, Ryan advises.

3

ENJOY THE RIDE. Many focus on the destination, but that’s such a small part of the journey, Ryan notes. Celebrating little wins along the way is essential.

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the experience of working with a team, and my time on the field bolstered my communication and team-building skills. Uniting a group around a product I’d created was a compelling prospect.

Beyond that, being an athlete — much like being an entrepreneur — requires dedication, and I had learned a lot from riding out the highs and lows of sports.

I left Goldman in 2010 to enroll in the Wharton MBA program at the University of Pennsylvania. That’s where I connected with a classmate and we created a concept for VerbalizeIt, which was eventually acquired by the CEO who insisted I go to the hospital after my accident.

The Ride to This App Saves Lives

My recovery after the 2015 accident was emotional and long, but it gave me time to think about how I could make a difference *and* make the roads safer for others. I was initially enraged about what had happened to me, but as I recovered, my anger transformed to motivation. I wanted to use my experience and knowledge to help instigate change.

It was during those long months that I was inspired to create a new company: This App Saves Lives. The aha moment came while I was researching the data.

I was appalled to learn that my experience was far from an isolated one: In 2010, the National Safety Council estimated that distracted driving caused more than 1.5 million accidents annually in the United States. And when I learned that an estimated nine people die every day in crashes involving a distracted driver, I felt lucky to have survived.

Ryan with his wife and kids in November 2022.



What resulted from my extensive research and brainstorming was the idea for a free mobile app that would reward drivers for every minute they drove attentively. They could passively use apps for navigating and streaming music, but engaging with anything that would take their eyes off the road would cause the driver to lose points. They could redeem points for vouchers to stores and restaurants.

We launched the app in 2020, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. We recently looked at a cohort of individual users and confirmed that they substantially increased the percentage of time they drive attentively.

As of August 2022, our nationwide community of members has driven 50 million miles, earned 83 million points, and redeemed 70,000 rewards. I’ve always loved building businesses from the ground up, but it feels especially amazing to be building one that’s making a real difference.

The Journey Ahead

Based on feedback, This App Saves Lives launched a Parent Portal in May 2022. It enables parents of young drivers to monitor and reward their children’s safe-driving habits, which is extremely important when you consider that distracted driving disproportionately affects teen and college-age drivers.

This feature is also important to me because I will one day be the parent of teens. At age 39, I have two young kids: a 4-year-old daughter and 1-year-old son. I want the roads to be safe for them, and for everyone else. Just a few months ago, when I was pushing my son in a stroller, a driver looking down at his phone nearly hit us.

My hope is that This App Saves Lives becomes synonymous with safe-driving behavior and continues to be a real force for change. We’re well on our way: The app is used in most countries, and we’re helping to make distracted driving a thing of the past.

In the meantime, you’ll find me in the office or cycling, dreaming up my next idea. My goals have changed since I was a boy wanting to play pro baseball, but my spirit remains the same. I feel lucky to be able to use the skills and knowledge I’ve gained over the years through baseball and business experiences to make a positive difference in the world. 🌱



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LIFE TIME



Real Fitness

Taking regular walks — whether it's one 30-minute jaunt or three 10-minute ones — is a great way to get more movement into your daily life. (And it's even better with friends!)

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Learn how you can exercise smarter with the minimum-effective-dose approach to fitness.

Fit for Gardening

Gardening is a great workout, but it may cause a lot of wear and tear on the body. These seven moves can help you tackle yard projects big and small.

BY HEIDI WACHTER

Madeline Hooper is a whiz with clippers and a trowel. But like most horticulture devotees, she's also nursed her share of aches and pains from tending to her flora. "It got to the point where I wanted to garden more but would wake up every morning in pain," she says.

That's when a fellow gardener introduced her to Jeff Hughes. The award-winning trainer fills his sessions with balance and strength techniques — which he teaches as habits, in line with a philosophy that if you "train the mind, the body will follow."

The pair clicked, and these days they take Hooper's knowledge of vegetation and Hughes's fitness expertise on the road, visiting gardeners across the country in the PBS series *GardenFit*.

During each episode, Hooper assesses the gardens while Hughes assesses the gardeners. "I start to see where they've created habits and do things that are causing them problems," Hughes says.

Hughes then offers fixes. "But I'm not fixing the problem; I'm fixing the mind," he explains. The pair checks in four weeks later with the gardener — who by then, it is hoped, has established a routine of using the suggested exercises.

The following movements can help any gardener establish the balance and strength necessary to create better habits, prevent injury, and minimize wear and tear on their most important gardening tool: their body.

DIG INTO THE MOVES

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

Warm-Up and Stretches

SIX-POINTS WARM-UP

A good warm-up moves blood into your muscles and stimulates the production of synovial fluid in your joints. Hughes suggests performing this gentle sequence, which addresses the back, neck, and torso, before you head out to the garden.



Gently raise your arms in front of you to shoulder height. Then, open your arms out to the sides, engaging your shoulder blades.

Lift your arms overhead. Avoid shrugging your shoulders as you raise your arms.

Reverse the movements to lower your arms to the sides at shoulder height.

Move your arms to the front, then all the way down. Complete the full sequence five times. Move gently and with control.

ONE-LEGGED HUG

This move stretches the glutes and lower-back muscles on the bent-leg side as well as the hip flexors on the straight-leg side.

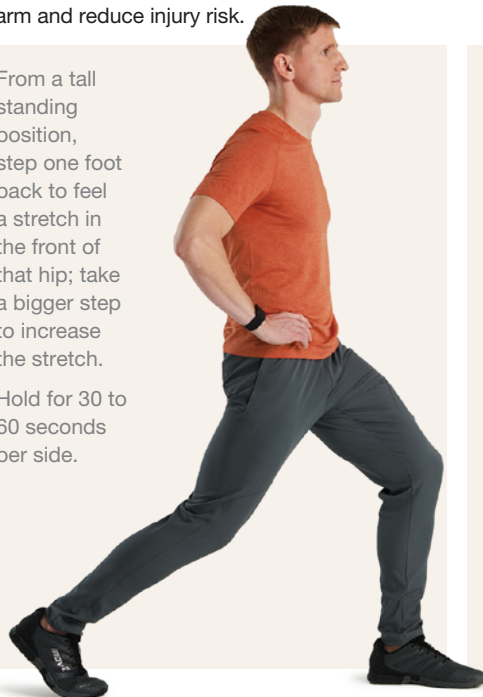
Standing, shift your weight to one leg and raise the opposite leg. Draw the raised leg toward your chest and hold the position for a breath. Lower and repeat on the opposite side. Complete three to five reps per leg.



HIP-FLEXOR STRETCH

Hip flexors are used every time you step, squat, or sit. Doing this simple stretch throughout the day can keep your muscles warm and reduce injury risk.

From a tall standing position, step one foot back to feel a stretch in the front of that hip; take a bigger step to increase the stretch. Hold for 30 to 60 seconds per side.



CALF RAISE

This move strengthens the structures around the knees. (For more on calf raises, visit ELmag.com/calraise.)

Shift your weight to the front of your feet. On a count of two, press through the balls of your feet to extend the ankles and raise the heels. Lower with control. Complete one to three sets of 10 to 12 reps.



The Moves

Support your body as you garden by getting into the habit of using the following movements.

ARMCHAIR

Getting down on and up off the ground can take a toll on your back and knees. Instead of kneeling, or standing folded forward at the waist, Hughes suggests, use the armchair move as a foundation. This fresh take on a squat provides the balance and structure necessary to stay in one place for as long as you need to dig, weed, or harvest in a 4-foot circular area.



TWIST

Sometimes, gardening calls for getting onto the ground. Inspired by watching his 6-year-old daughter get up and down with ease, Hughes came up with this move to help a client who'd given up golf because he couldn't retrieve his ball without hurting his knees. It's also ideal for gardeners.



BREATHING-IN POSTURE

This is a good way to engage and strengthen your shoulder-blade muscles while also providing a stretch for tight side and chest muscles.



Standing tall, slowly raise your arms over your head, inhaling so your lungs are full of air at the top. Hold your breath and lower and raise your arms three times. Move at a brisk pace, with control.

Continuing to hold your breath, lower your arms to your sides.

On an exhale, draw your shoulders down and back. Hold for 30 seconds, breathing normally.

Complete the entire sequence three to five times. 🔄

HEIDI WACHTER is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

GARDENING: THE ULTIMATE MIND-BODY WORKOUT

The health benefits of gardening go beyond reaping a harvest of vegetables and fruits. Pulling weeds, raking, reaching for various plants and tools, and twisting and bending as you plant all work the muscles in your body and build strength, stamina, and flexibility. Gardening can also help you grow in these ways.

INCREASE EXPOSURE TO VITAMIN D. Outdoor activities like gardening are great ways to catch some rays while pursuing a hobby.

REDUCE DEMENTIA RISK. One study tracking 2,805 seniors age 60 and up concluded that physical activity, including gardening, could lower the risk of dementia later in life.

BOOST MOOD. A raft of research shows that exposure to gardens and other natural areas is associated with less depression, anxiety, and stress.

IMPROVE SELF-ESTEEM. In one study, community gardeners in London reported feelings of higher self-esteem than a nongardener control group. Nurturing and harvesting plants is a great way to accomplish tasks and achieve successes that can build resilience outside the garden.

BUILD COMMUNITY. Gardens — especially community gardens — strengthen neighborhoods by increasing social connection, reciprocity, trust, and civic engagement.

CONNECT WITH NATURE. Nurturing plants offers a unique way to create a special bond with the environment that can make you feel part of something bigger than yourself.



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The Halo

Boost your shoulder mobility and challenge your core strength with this two-for-one move.

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

Begin with a light weight (2 to 15 pounds, for most people) to ensure good form.

Keep your core engaged and your shoulders stacked over your hips.

Gradually use more weight as you become more comfortable with the exercise.



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

The halo isn't as angelic as it sounds. A sneaky-hard strength move, it calls for holding a kettlebell or other weighted implement (think dumbbell or weight plate) and circling it around your head to trace a halo shape. This movement takes your shoulders through a wide range of motion, making it an effective exercise for building upper-body strength and mobility.

Although it's often thought of as a shoulder exercise, the halo also works the biceps, triceps, traps, forearms, and hands. It lights up your core as well, because it calls on stabilizing muscles in the abdomen and hips to maintain good posture and keep your shoulders and lower back safe.

The key to getting the most out of the halo is maintaining great form.

Avoid bending side to side, which takes the work out of your shoulders, and don't arch your spine, which can irritate your lower back.

Make your halo small and tight, keeping your arms in close to your head. Have hair on your head? You'll know you're staying tight enough if it gets messed up.

Follow these additional tips to maximize your halo work.

INSTRUCTIONS

1

Stand tall with your feet about hip width apart and hold a weight with two hands. If you're using a kettlebell, flip the weight so the bell is on top and directly in front of you. (The handle should face down.)

2

Engage your core and your shoulder blades, then begin circling the weight around your head in one direction.

3

Draw a full circle and return to the starting position. Move slowly and resist the urge to flare your ribs or bend to the side.

4

Perform eight to 10 repetitions in one direction, then switch and repeat.

GET MORE MOVES

For seven halo variations, visit ELmag.com/halo.

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



Minimal Workouts, Maximal Results

“Go hard or go home” isn’t the only way to work out. Instead, you can exercise smarter using a minimum-effective-dose approach.

BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

Common wisdom says the more exercise, the better. If you record fewer than 10,000 steps a day, your pedometer might send you a disappointed emoji. If you work out twice a week, your trainer may urge you to shoot for three times.

With everything and everyone saying you’re not doing enough, it’s easy to believe that the only way to be fit is to train as if you were aiming for a spot at the next Olympics.

But it isn’t so. You don’t have to work out all day every day to see results.

Some athletes might require high levels of purposeful training. An Olympic swimmer hoping to shave a tenth of a second off her 50-meter freestyle, for example, might need three hours of exercise a day.

But for most people who want to build strength for a healthy everyday life, three workouts of 30 to 60 minutes each week is often sufficient.

And a sedentary person might get measurable improvements in fitness from even a brisk walk every day.

“It all depends on your goals and your training status,” says Life Time national education manager Jason Stella, NASM, PES, CES.

The misguided belief that you need to go hard or go home prevents many people from sticking with a fitness routine — or sometimes from even getting started. They may think it’s not doable, not worth it, or not tenable.

In fact, a minimum effective dose (MED) of exercise can get most people most of the way to their fitness goals. Another way to think about this is that most of the results come from a small portion of work.

So, rather than wondering how much exercise you can cram into your already busy life, a better question might be “What is the minimum effective dose of exercise for my goals?”

The answer, it seems, is pretty darn minimal.

The Minimum Effective Dose

If you're seeking increased longevity and protection from chronic disease, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week, or 30 minutes most days of the week. "Moderate exercise" is about a 5 or 6 on an effort scale of 1 to 10 — a brisk walk is just about right.

That regimen is not only humane but flexible. "When you're going minimal, it doesn't matter whether you do your movement all at once or in little snacks," says trainer Ebenezer Samuel, CSCS.

INCREASING STRENGTH

If your goals revolve around building strength and muscle, "85 percent of your maximum gains could be seen with just three 60-minute sessions per week — three hours total," says Bret Contreras, PhD, author of *Glute Lab*.

The key to progress is how you spend that time — specifically, the balance of effort and volume.

While both are important, Contreras says, effort (how hard you work relative to your maximum capacity) matters more than volume (the total amount of physical work you perform, usually calculated by multiplying reps by weight lifted).

You can gauge your effort based on the rate of perceived exertion (RPE): a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is as easy as sitting on the couch and 10 is your absolute max capacity.

That doesn't mean you have to use maximal weight and push to failure. Rather, after warm-ups, each set will get close to your maximum effort — an 8 or higher on your RPE scale.

"When you're working minimally, intensity matters more than volume or frequency," agrees Samuel.

Aim for one or two sets of one or two moves per muscle group, three times a week. Just make sure you push those sets to the edge.



AMPING UP ENDURANCE

Your options for aerobic exercise comprise more than just long endurance sessions. As with strength building, you can improve your cardiovascular functioning with a minimal time commitment.

In addition to tracking your step count, another time-saving cardio fix is performing a couple sessions per week of high-intensity interval training (HIIT).

In each HIIT workout, you perform repeated, short bursts of near-maximal effort, each followed by a rest period. The duration of your work and rest periods can vary — some coaches recommend work periods of up to 60 seconds, with rest periods about twice that long. But a 2021 study suggests that you can get measurable benefits from even four-second bouts of high-effort activity, each followed by 15 to 30 seconds of rest, repeated for 10 to 20 minutes.

Do these workouts twice a week — ideally on a low-impact cardio machine, like an air bike, a rowing machine, or a stairclimber — and you'll give your heart health and stamina a boost.

For this strategy to succeed, though, the intervals in a HIIT workout must be high effort — likely higher than you're used to. You need to make up for what you lose in volume with additional levels of effort.

Three 10-minute walks a day is as good as one 30-minute walk. And if five 30-minute walks over the course of a week isn't feasible, three 50-minute walks will do. Just get that movement in.

Many people, though, aren't only seeking to maintain their status quo or stave off chronic disease; they're seeking more strength, more endurance, and more mobility. For them, the MED is higher — but in most cases, it's still surprisingly low. Here's how it breaks down for these common fitness goals.

IMPROVING MOBILITY

To maintain or improve range of motion or to warm up for a workout, most trainers agree, static stretching — holding a toe-touch position for 30 seconds or more, for example — is less effective than dynamic stretching. With dynamic stretches, you repeatedly move in and out of a stretched position, as in a high-knee walk or a standing arm-circle movement.

To improve joint range of motion, "stretch the muscles you plan to work for one to three minutes before your strength workouts," advises physical therapist and strength coach John Rusin, DPT, CSCS.

Once your workout begins, be sure to use a full, controlled range of motion on all your strength moves: stretching your arms fully when you do a row or a pull-down; squatting as low as possible (provided you don't experience pain); or lowering your chest as far as possible on pushups.

This strategy — strengthening a muscle after you've lengthened it — leads to adaptations that are not stimulated by stretching alone, Rusin explains. "Your body has to stabilize the new range of motion, which leads to more lasting improvements in flexibility." 🧠



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

A man with dreadlocks is shown in profile, lifting a heavy barbell. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and a purple wristband. The background is a gym setting with a blurred barbell rack. The text 'TRAINING IS EVERYTHING' is overlaid in large, white, bold letters.

TRAINING IS EVERYTHING

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Spring Awakening

A reflection on harnessing the energy of the season.

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

“March is the Month of Expectation,” or so Emily Dickinson wrote nearly 150 years ago. The poet wasn’t writing about exercise, but this line comes to mind each year as winter gives way to spring and I reflect on the ways that the changing season affects fitness — not fitness level, but fitness mindset.

March is a month of promise. Just as we watch the natural world come back to life, we have expectations of self-renewal. For those of us who made resolutions or set intentions in January, March is when our hard work is expected to noticeably pay off — a time to see, feel, and embody the fruits of our labors.

But March is also a month of bluster and broken promises. Just as a late-season blizzard delays the burgeoning buds here in the Upper Midwest, it’s not uncommon for reality to temper our great expectations when it comes to fitness.

Someone who started or restarted an exercise program at the New Year may find even the best of intentions falling by the wayside. Someone who manages to maintain their fitness commitments may find that, by March, the routine is unsustainable and running them into the ground.

Even those of us who don’t set new fitness goals at the turn of the calendar year may find that we’ve quietly been carrying the weight of unspoken expectations for the weeks and months ahead.

This transitional time is a make-or-break moment for many exercisers

— a time to reflect on our achievements, or perceived lack thereof. Too often, the result of this reflection is not self-compassion, not grace, not space to adapt and change course, but a decision to give up.

I don’t write any of this with judgment, criticism, or blame. I’m not here to tell you to “pull it together” or “get back in the game.” I’m not even here to say, “Don’t give up.” You do you. I’ve been there and certainly will be again. It is human to have high expectations, and it is human to be disappointed when reality is at odds with the promises we’ve made to ourselves.

Rather, I’m writing from a place of curiosity, to pose a series of questions that I am also asking myself: What do you expect from your fitness routine — and yourself? How do these expectations serve you? How do they weigh you down? Can you lower them, or even put them aside without giving up on yourself?

When I was a kid, I was advised to have “high standards and low expectations.” I liked the sound of these words and have carried them with me ever since. But reciting the adage is not the same as living by the wisdom: Lowering my expectations — especially as they relate to my body, what it looks like, and how it performs — has been a hard, slow, repetitive lesson.

Many of the expectations we contend with are conditioned. We are taught to make sweeping changes and expect dramatic transformations. We are told that thin is in and strong is the new skinny. That we should

strive to be better every day. We are expected to suck it up, accept that there is no gain without pain, and embrace better versions of ourselves: leaner, stronger, faster, fitter, happier.

To be clear, I don’t believe there is anything wrong with having fitness goals. My quarrel is with the expectation that we should all be pursuing and achieving these goals in a linear, predictable fashion. And that if we don’t, we are failing — we are failures.

I want to be at peace, in mind, body, and spirit. I want to move my body without sacrificing that peace.

I think we can look to March for inspiration here, too. Because it’s a month not only of expectations, of difficult transitions, of broken promises, but also of wild weather, from which we can learn patience, and of burgeoning buds, from which we can learn tenderness.

And so I ask you, as I ask myself: Where can you benefit from being patient with yourself in your fitness journey? Where can you be a little more tender, with the understanding that tenderness isn’t frailty but resilience?

There aren’t easy answers to anything I’m asking. But I’ve found that sometimes simply asking the question is the first step to finding movement.



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

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Real Food



Dips, sauces, desserts, even baby foods — your blender is not just for smoothies anymore! Blend up something delicious with our five recipes.

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Find Robin Asbell's recipe for healthy and pure Root Veggie Baby Food at ELmag.com/blenderrecipes.

Reflux Remedies

Five steps to manage acid reflux and recover the pleasure of eating.

BY **STEPHANIE SOUCHERAY**

For some, it's a harbinger of middle age; for others, it's the hallmark of the later weeks of pregnancy. At some point, though, almost everyone will experience acid reflux.

With symptoms including heartburn, sour stomach, and indigestion, this burning, churning condition likely conjures up images of late-night trips to the medicine cabinet for relief. Typically episodic, acid reflux can become chronic and develop into gastroesophageal reflux disease — better known as GERD. Though they're often confused, acid reflux is a symptom of GERD.

“Acid reflux is to GERD as bloating is to IBS,” explains licensed functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN. “It’s a major symptom, but it’s not the whole picture.”

Other GERD symptoms include difficulty swallowing, nausea, regurgitation, chest pain, bloating, and even the wearing away of tooth enamel.

GERD may also involve laryngopharyngeal reflux, or “silent reflux.” (Some health-care providers consider this a separate condition, while others view it as an additional symptom of GERD.) In these cases, stomach acid travels through the esophagus and into the throat, so instead of indigestion, sufferers typically present with a hoarse voice and a sore throat.

Between 18 and 28 percent of Americans suffer from GERD, and millions routinely treat it with over-the-counter or prescription medications, including antacids, H₂ blockers, and proton pump inhibitors (PPIs).

Yet, for lasting relief, a growing number of nutritionists and holistic-health practitioners are recommending starting in the kitchen rather than the medicine cabinet. “There’s a huge mind–body connection to GERD,” said Haas, who takes a food-first approach with her clients. “The question is, how do I help the stomach function more appropriately?”



ILLUSTRATIONS: REBECCA SANTO

Look Under the Hood

GERD is a “mechanical” problem, explains Haas. “The issue is more about the stomach not being able to contain the acid it’s producing, when it should be really well contained — there is laxity in the lower esophageal sphincter.”

Here’s where the image of a pregnant belly makes sense for understanding reflux: The growing baby pushes up on the stomach, forcing the sphincter to open and relax, spilling stomach acid back up into the esophagus.

Food can both aggravate and ameliorate acid reflux, but if yours is linked to stress, hiatal hernia, abdominal weight gain, or pregnancy, changing your diet may not be enough to relieve the burn. In these instances, Haas says, it’s best to seek support from a healthcare professional.

It’s also a good idea to visit your doctor to rule out a *Helicobacter pylori* infection: This bacterium causes

stomach ulcers, which are a common comorbidity of reflux, she notes.

Understanding the structural issues behind some cases of reflux also reveals the shortcomings of antacids and acid reducers. Neither prescription nor over-the-counter drugs can fix a hernia or relieve stress. Worse still, when taken in excess, they may compound the problem and create others (see “The Trouble With Antacids” on page 41).

It’s important to consider the causes of your reflux before depending on drugs for relief.

Once you’ve ruled out a structural issue, it’s time to look at food. What we eat and, just as important, how and when we eat play substantial roles in causing and correcting acid reflux. Consider these steps for addressing reflux with behavior change and diet.

1.

FIND AND AVOID YOUR TRIGGERS.

Identifying your reflux-triggering foods starts with conducting an inventory of possible suspects. Cindi Lockhart, RDN, LD, an integrative and functional-nutrition practitioner, recommends starting with the most common culprits: caffeine, alcohol, citrus, and spicy, fried, or fatty foods.

Removing most or even one of those foods or beverages might be enough for some people, she says. Alcohol, for example, can relax the lower esophageal sphincter (as can fried foods, and even peppermint tea), while other foods may simply not agree with your stomach.

If removing these common offenders does nothing to help your reflux, it may be time to dig deeper and undergo an elimination diet. (For one such protocol, see ELmag.com/eliminationdiet.)

“Sometimes, clients don’t want to know what is triggering their reflux, because it may mean having to make a difficult change,” Haas says. But chronic reflux can damage the delicate mucosal membranes

in the esophagus, which is painful. Most sufferers will eventually have to choose between the discomfort of giving up a favored food and increasingly painful reflux.

Lockhart often suggests trying one of two healing diets — an elimination diet or a low-histamine protocol (histamines are chemicals used by the immune system to help protect the body from allergens) — for one month, while keeping a journal.

These restrictive diets are meant to be followed short-term, allowing the gut to heal and repair. Then, when foods are re-introduced, triggers tend to be easier to spot. (To learn more about certain elimination diets, see

ELmag.com/fodmaps; for more on histamines, see ELmag.com/histamines.)

“When you add in foods one by one, you should see patterns with your reflux,” Lockhart says.





2.

NOTICE YOUR EATING BEHAVIORS.

Just as important as food triggers are behavioral triggers. Both Haas and Lockhart advise clients with reflux to sit down for meals, eat more slowly, and chew their food until it's liquid.

"Eating in a relaxed state, so the parasympathetic state is turned on, is so important," says Haas. "And I recommend thorough chewing to every client with digestive symptoms. Chewing our food well dramatically improves the ability of organs to do their job. Your teeth are the only part of your body that can chew."

It may also be helpful to reduce meal size to avoid overloading the digestive system. Too much food at one sitting can cause pressure on the stomach's sphincter, forcing it open and triggering symptoms.

Haas and Lockhart both suggest being moderate with beverages at meals, too — no guzzling. "I encourage people to drink less than 4 ounces during a meal," says Lockhart, as liquids add volume to the stomach, and this added pressure can cause reflux symptoms.

Lockhart notes that being mindful of meal timing is helpful for people

with GERD. "Digestion is strongest in the first half of the day and weakest in the second half of day. The old saying 'Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, and dinner like a pauper' is really helpful for reflux."

Lockhart recommends eating your last meal or snack of the day no less than three hours before you go to bed, to leave plenty of time for digestion. Food that remains in the stomach when you lie down is more likely to create spillover that irritates the esophagus. "If you eat heavy and late, you're going to have an uncomfortable night."

It's helpful to cut back on distractions while you eat, including phones, computers, and TVs. Sit down, take all the time you need to chew your food, and do your best to give your plate your full attention. For some people, just allowing for more relaxed meal-times can be enough to reduce reflux.

Finally, Lockhart suggests a postmeal stroll. A 10- to 15-minute leisurely walk can do wonders to aid digestion, move food through the system, and help us relax. Any other daily practices that support stress relief, such as meditation, can also help in controlling reflux.

3.

EAT BETTER TO DIGEST BETTER.

Once you've identified your trigger foods and adjusted any reflux-related eating behaviors, it's time to add foods to your diet that can improve digestion. Lockhart says these will replace the highly palatable processed carbohydrates and convenience foods of the typical American diet, which she notes contains "few actual plants."

The diet Lockhart recommends contains plenty of them. "A lot of colorful vegetables, clean protein, healthy fats, some fruit, and single whole grains" are the focus, she explains. She offers clients an easy visual for trying to improve digestive health: Always fill half your plate with colorful plants. For fruits, aim for less acidic options, such as bananas.

Haas says fiber is usually her first recommendation for any client looking to improve digestive health, including reducing reflux. "Soluble fiber slows down transit time in the stomach and helps to increase the time the stomach has to access nutrients in the foods," she says. Fiber also keeps you satiated longer.

Lockhart believes that eating between meals may aggravate reflux because it may keep certain aspects of the digestive process active.

"We are not set up to graze all day long," she adds. "Every time you eat, you turn on the digestion process, with no time to rest and repair. With enough protein, fat, and fiber, we should be able to make it four or five hours between meals."

4.

ADD NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT.

Certain foods, herbs, and supplements also offer safe, long-term support for reducing reflux.

Ginger, fennel, and parsley may help calm the digestive system. Teas made with these foods can also be beneficial, especially if sipped slowly after meals.

Probiotics, which help support intestinal flora, are also key for some people, and eating fermented foods, such as kimchi, miso, and sauerkraut, can support better digestion and help reduce reflux symptoms.

Haas also recommends supplements: Zinc carnosine, glutamine, and magnesium can aid general digestion, ensure regular bowel movements, and reduce systemic inflammation.

Another option is adding acid to your diet. Haas says that some of her patients with reflux benefit from this

practice, usually in the form of drinking a small amount (a tablespoon or so) of pickle brine or apple-cider vinegar before meals.

If you try this and it aggravates your symptoms, then this approach is not for you. If it helps, your reflux symptoms may be triggered by low levels of hydrochloric acid (HCL) in the stomach, a condition called hypochlorhydria. Confusingly, this condition feels like too *much* stomach acid, because you still feel that burn in the esophagus.

Adequate HCL is crucial for proper digestion, and levels drop as you age, as well as when you take some medications, including oral contraceptives. There are HCL tablets that you can take before meals, but only if recommended by your health-care practitioner.



5.

DOUSE THE FLAMES.

If reflux still crops up occasionally when you eat a trigger food or dine late, you might seek out herbs and foods that can help soothe the burn when needed. But even natural remedies are just symptom management and not treatment, Haas explains: “You still have to remove the offending factors.”

On-the-spot, nondrug remedies *can* help you break the antacid habit, though. Most antacids are reasonably safe, but using them routinely can inhibit healthy digestion. (See “The Trouble With Antacids,” below.)

Marshmallow root and slippery elm are two of Haas’s favorite supplements to help manage reflux symptoms. Aloe-vera juice and licorice tea or lozenges can also calm a fiery gut. These compounds all have soothing qualities, creating a viscous solution in the gut that coats the membranes in the stomach and esophagus. This reduces irritation and inflammation.

Lockhart suggests a quick fix that your grandmother would recognize: a teaspoon of baking soda in water. “It’s a tried-and-true quick solution for heartburn,” she says. “It works!”

STEPHANIE SOUCHERAY is a Minneapolis-based health journalist.

THE TROUBLE WITH ANTACIDS

Over-the-counter antacid tablets, which are typically chewable or effervescent, contain calcium, magnesium, and aluminum salts that quickly neutralize stomach acid.

Though convenient, cheap, and relatively safe, antacids are not meant to be taken multiple times per day for days on end. Chronic use can create problems, such as constipation or diarrhea.

These drugs can also interact dangerously with other medications. People

taking calcium or those with high blood pressure should be cautious about regular antacid use.

Others may seek relief from reflux with H2 blockers and proton pump inhibitors (PPIs). Both medications are available over the counter or by prescription, and both reduce the body’s production of stomach acid.

Although PPIs are useful for treating peptic ulcers, they are also commonly prescribed for long-term use

for GERD — yet they weren’t meant to be used this way.

“The FDA recommends PPI use for four to eight weeks, but many people take them daily for years,” explains functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN.

Long-term use of acid blockers can lead to other uncomfortable digestive symptoms, like bloat. “PPIs and other types of acid blockers change the pH of your stomach from acid to alkaline, turning it into a nice, friendly place for

bacteria to settle and multiply — and produce lots of bloat-causing hydrogen and methane gas,” explains integrative gastroenterologist Robynne Chutkan, MD. “If you’ve been taking acid-suppressing drugs for more than a few months, it could be the reason you’re bloated.”

Seeking a quick fix makes sense: GERD and reflux are uncomfortable. But if you can figure out the root cause, treating that is the best bet for long-term relief.



PLAY FEARLESS

JUST HIT THE BALL.
CLASH V2 WILL TAKE
CARE OF THE REST.



CLASH V2



Veracruz-Style Whitefish

This recipe is inspired by *pescado a la veracruzana*, a colorful Mexican dish that's quick to prep and full of bright flavor.

BY RYAN DODGE

Makes four servings
Prep time: 10 minutes
Cook time: 25 minutes



2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil



4 4-oz. fillets of whitefish, such as cod, snapper, or halibut



Sea salt, to taste



Freshly ground black pepper, to taste



1 yellow onion, julienned



4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced



1 cup dry, fruity wine, such as Sauvignon Blanc



3 lb. fresh tomatoes, diced, or 2 14-oz. cans diced tomatoes



¼ cup capers, strained



1 cup sliced green Manzanilla olives



Fabulous Fish

Whitefish is an excellent source of lean protein and a variety of B vitamins, which help fight inflammation and support immune function, among other health benefits.

Choose a large sauté pan or skillet with a lid. Place the pan over medium heat, add the olive oil, and heat until shimmering.

Season the fish fillets on both sides with salt and black pepper to taste. Gently place the fillets in the pan and cook until golden on one side, about two to three minutes.

Flip the fish and add the onion and garlic to the pan. Gently sauté the ingredients around the fish until the onion is translucent, about five minutes.

Pour in the wine to deglaze the pan, scraping the bottom to release any browned bits, and continue cooking until the wine is reduced by half, about five to seven minutes.

Add the tomatoes, capers, and olives. Stir, cover the pan, and lower the heat to a simmer. Cook for five to seven minutes to allow the flavors to combine, then remove the lid and turn off the heat. Garnish with fresh basil and serve with a loaf of crispy bread for dipping, if desired.



Cook With Books

Our food editor makes the case for setting our devices to the side and going analog in the kitchen.

BY **KAELYN RILEY**

My cookbook obsession began the way many others' probably have — with my mother's copy of the *Better Homes and Gardens New Cook Book*. It's the classic with the red-and-white checkered cover, a trusted staple in American kitchens since its first printing in 1930. My mom's edition is from sometime in the early '80s.

As a kid, I loved the way a recipe made something seem possible. I didn't know anything about cooking or baking, but I really loved to read — and so I could stumble my way through making a batch of granola or a pitcher of lemonade, so long as my dad was around to get stuff down from the highest shelves.

That cookbook is still in my parents' kitchen in Illinois, covered in smears and stains from my earliest

cooking endeavors, the binding forever splintered apart at the page for chocolate-chip cookies.

I'm an adult now (sort of), with my own collection of cookbooks to smudge, trendily organized by color on the bookshelf in my kitchen. But, for the most part, these cookbooks have been more decorative than functional. Nowadays, when I'm in need of a recipe, I typically reach for my phone.

That is, I did until recently, when I acquired a cookbook stand. The little beechwood frame allows me to prop a book open right next to my cutting board or stove, so I can easily refer to the recipe while I'm chopping or sautéing. It's a small shift that's made a big difference in the quality of my time in the kitchen.

Here's what I've been enjoying most about my rediscovered love of cooking with books.

I don't have to try to memorize recipes. I think a lot of us labor under the delusion that memorizing recipes is the right way to cook, the way real chefs do it: no instructions, just instincts. But even with dishes I've made several times before, without the recipe in front of me, I often need to turn away from what's happening in the kitchen to double-check the correct oven temperature or how many cloves of garlic I need — and dividing my attention like that makes it more likely that I'll slip up.

It can also make for a chaotic cooking experience, and that's simply not the vibe I'm trying to bring to mealtime. (For more on how a calm mind can support digestive health, see ELmag.com/mindfuldigestion.)

I can be more mindful about what's cooking. Some of the most magical

cooking moments really need your active attention. If you've ever made *cacio e pepe*, for instance, you know that gradually adding the Parmesan and pasta water to the pan with the noodles (and stirring vigorously as you go) is how you get that perfectly creamy, emulsified sauce. You cannot, while making *cacio e pepe*, also be checking your email or letting the dog out. It's not a time meant for multitasking.

In my experience, watching a dish like that come together in front of me is more instructive than reading about it. Once I've made it happen myself, I can replicate it, but it's not the same if I'm frantically scrolling through my phone to check that I've added the right amount of cheese.

Related: I'm cutting back on screen time. These days, I'll take any excuse I can find to put my phone down. One of the things I love most about cooking is the immersive sensory experience; going low-tech in the kitchen has made it that much more available and enjoyable for me. (For more on how engaging your senses can help you become a better cook, see ELmag.com/cookwithyoursenses.)

The average cellphone is also super germ-y, so leaving mine away from my dinner prep — and, er, disinfecting it regularly — feels like an easy win. (If you're trying to break free from tech addiction, get some tips at ELmag.com/mindfultech.)

I'm making better food. I love Pinterest as much as the next Millennial, which is how I know there's a real glut of subpar recipes online. A cookbook, in contrast, is typically years in the making. Each recipe is carefully developed

and tested and cross-tested, often multiple times, to ensure that the reader can re-create the dish.

Using my favorite cookbooks feels like cooking with a dear (and experienced) friend, one who's doling out timing advice and sensory cues to help me make a dish they truly love, the way they truly intend for me to make it. Don't miss out on all that care and attention to detail!

I can still improvise. The kitchen advice that most resonates with me is simple: Cook for yourself. That means not only making your own meals at home when you can, but also doing it in the way that makes the most sense for you.

Often, that involves looking at a recipe (even the most thoughtfully developed, lovingly cross-tested one) as a guideline rather than a dogma. Sometimes you need to add more stock to the risotto, or use the green beans that you have on hand rather than the broccoli that you don't.

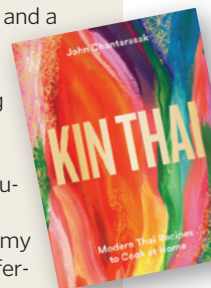
Cooking with a recipe in front of you doesn't mean you can't deviate from the text. Some of the best cookbooks, in fact, empower you with info for making seasonal swaps or tweaking a dish to suit your needs.

My favorite cookbooks are turning into journals. Now that I'm using them more often, my cookbooks are becoming much more functional than decorative. I make notes in the margins about what worked well, what I'd change up the next time around, or what I might add or skip to make a springtime dish work in the fall. My favorite recipes are starting to stand out, kind of like that old *BHG* recipe for chocolate-chip cookies, because they're the pages I've turned to — and smudged and scribbled on — the most. 🍪

WHAT I'M READING (AND COOKING)

KIN THAI BY JOHN CHANTARASAK

Born in Liverpool to a Thai father and a British mother, Chantarasak uses the term "Anglo-Thai" to describe his style of Thai cooking with ingredients from the British Isles. (Also, without the hyphen, it's the name of his London restaurant.) Some of his chili jams and relishes are in regular rotation in my kitchen, and I love his habit of offering swaps for hard-to-find products, such as cinnamon for cassia bark and Sichuan peppercorns for prickly ash.



SALAD FREAK BY JESS DAMUCK

The self-proclaimed Bob Ross of salads, Damuck knows that creating the perfect salad is something of an art form. By combining different flavors, textures, and colors, you can make something fresh and delicious that will make you feel good, too: a salad you'll truly look forward to eating. Damuck's book is full of recipes to help you make it happen.



EVERYDAY DORIE BY DORIE GREENSPAN

A five-time James Beard Award winner and the author of more than a dozen cookbooks, Greenspan is such a giant in the food world that this pick feels almost too obvious. Then again, it is the most-used book in my kitchen, and I think the Caramel-Pear and Five-Spice Upside-Down Cake is the best thing I've ever baked.



KOREAN AMERICAN BY ERIC KIM

Caramelized-Kimchi Baked Potatoes. Cheeseburger Kim-bap. Gochujang Chocolate Lava Cakes. Born and raised in Atlanta, Kim moved back there for a year at the beginning of the pandemic to develop these recipes with his mother, who's from South Korea. The book's recipes explore "that tension, and the ultimate harmony, between the Korean in me as well as the American in me," Kim writes, "through the food my family grew up eating and the food I cook for myself now."



The Perfect Blend

Try one of these recipes to whip up something delicious.

BY **ROBIN ASBELL**

The blender is not just for smoothies: It's a useful tool for breaking things down in soups, sauces, salsas, and so much more. And because blenders can chop, grind, and mince, you can spend less time laboring over your cutting board and more time enjoying nutritious meals.

High-speed blenders, once mostly used in professional kitchens, are a popular option for home cooks these days. Their powerful motors are built for liquefying even tough ingredients, like fibrous kale stems and sticky dates. They can also make smoothies and juices from whole fruits and veggies with the flip of a switch.

If you're using a high-speed blender, it's important to control the speed carefully: Always start on low and then increase slowly to high. If your blender has a tamper, use it to push the food around while the motor is running to help achieve the desired texture.

You can use a regular blender to make any of these recipes — just be prepared to stop and scrape down the sides of the pitcher as needed to keep things moving. Happy blending!

Spanish Salsa Verde

Makes about 1¼ cups
Prep time: 10 minutes

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup red- or white-wine vinegar
- 4 large anchovies, drained, or 2 tsp. anchovy paste
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 cups lightly packed fresh basil
- 2 cups lightly packed fresh parsley
- 1 cup lightly packed fresh mint
- 2 tbs. drained capers
- ½ tsp. sea salt

Place all ingredients in a blender. Secure the lid and purée until smooth. Transfer to a bowl and use immediately, or store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to two days.

This fresh green sauce is perfect over fish or chicken, tossed with rice or pasta, or as a topping for eggs.





Vegan Nacho Queso

Makes about 2½ cups
Prep time: six hours (soaking),
plus 15 minutes

- 1 cup raw cashews
- Cold water
- 1½ cups unsweetened almond milk
- ¼ cup canola oil, avocado oil, or olive oil
- 2 tbs. red miso
- 2 tsp. freshly squeezed lime juice
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced
- ¼ cup nutritional yeast
- 6 tbs. arrowroot or cornstarch
- 1 tsp. sea salt
- ¼ tsp. ground turmeric
- 2 large jalapeño peppers, finely chopped

Place the cashews in a bowl and add cold water to cover; let soak at room temperature for six hours. Drain well.

Place the drained cashews, almond milk, oil, miso, lime juice, garlic, nutritional yeast, arrowroot, salt, and turmeric in a blender. Blend on medium-low speed until smooth, then increase the speed to high and blend for four minutes or until the mixture has thickened. Add the jalapeños and pulse to incorporate.

Warm gently on the stovetop if desired, or transfer the queso to a bowl and serve immediately.

You can keep soaking the cashews in the refrigerator for up to four days; if you don't get around to making this dip right away, they won't go bad.



Aquafaba Mayo

Makes about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup
Prep time: eight hours or overnight (soaking)
Cook time: 40 minutes

- 2 tbs. dried chickpeas
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups water, divided
- 2 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. sea salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. paprika
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. ground turmeric
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Place the chickpeas in a small bowl and add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water. Let soak overnight at room temperature. Drain and rinse.

Place the chickpeas and the remaining water in a blender and secure the lid. Blend on high speed until smooth, then scrape the chickpea purée into a small saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring often. Reduce the heat and simmer, stirring often, for 20 minutes to cook the beans (the mixture will thicken slightly). Scrape the chickpea mixture into a measuring cup and, if necessary, add enough cold water to make $\frac{1}{2}$ cup. Let cool to room temperature.

Transfer the chickpea mixture to a blender and add the mustard, lemon juice, sugar, salt, paprika, and turmeric. Secure the lid and blend until mixed, stopping to scrape down the pitcher as necessary.

Remove the lid plug, then continue blending on low speed while very slowly pouring the oil through the lid opening. Purée until smooth.

Transfer the mayo to a jar and refrigerate for at least two hours, until set to a firmer texture, or for up to one week.



Avocado Green Goddess Dressing With Basil

Makes about 1 cup
Prep time: 10 minutes

- 1 large avocado
- 2 tbs. white vinegar
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 cup lightly packed fresh basil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup lightly packed fresh parsley
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. sea salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Halve the avocado, remove the pit, and scoop the flesh into a blender. Add the vinegar, garlic, basil, parsley, and salt. Secure the lid and blend until smooth. Remove the lid plug, then continue blending on low speed while very slowly pouring the oil through the lid opening. Purée until smooth.

Transfer the dressing to a jar and use immediately or store in the refrigerator for up to two days.

Try making this dressing with lemon juice instead of vinegar, or with other fresh herbs, such as mint or cilantro.





If the sorbet isn't as thick as you like, either transfer it to an airtight container and freeze for an hour or keep blending and gradually add ice cubes to achieve the desired texture.

Mixed Berry Sorbet

Makes seven servings
Prep time: five minutes

- ¼ cup unsweetened apple juice
- ¼ cup liquid (raw) honey
- 1 lb. frozen mixed berries

Place the apple juice, honey, and berries in a blender. Secure the lid and blend until smooth and thick.

Serve immediately, or transfer to an airtight container and store in the freezer for up to one week.

Let frozen sorbet soften in the refrigerator for 20 minutes before serving if it's hard to scoop. ↻

GET MORE!

Find Robin's recipe for Root Veggie Baby Food at ELmag.com/blenderrecipes.



The
GREAT

D i g i t a l

DECLUTTER

A THREE-STEP PLAN

TO STREAMLINE YOUR DIGITAL LIFE AND RECLAIM TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST TO YOU.

BY **CAL NEWPORT, PHD**

Smartphones, wireless internet, digital platforms that connect billions of people — these are triumphant innovations. Few people think we'd be better off retreating to an earlier technological age.

Still, many are also tired of feeling like prisoners to their devices.

Our relationship with digital tools is complicated by the fact that they mix harm with benefits. One can simultaneously cherish the ability to discover inspiring photos on Instagram and fret about the app's capacity to invade the evening hours that were once spent reading or talking with friends. These contradictions create a jumbled emotional landscape.

The most common response to such complexities is to attempt

modest hacks. Perhaps if you observe a digital Sabbath, keep your phone away from your bed at night, or turn off notifications and resolve to be more mindful, you can keep all the good things that attracted you to these technologies in the first place while minimizing their worst impacts.

I understand the appeal of this moderate approach. It relieves the need to make hard decisions about your digital life; you don't have to quit anything, miss out on any benefits, or suffer any serious inconveniences. Nor do you have to explain your digital absence to friends who may find it alarming.

Yet it's clear to those who have attempted these minor corrections that willpower and vague resolutions are often not enough to stop

these new technologies from invading our cognitive landscapes. The addictiveness of their design and the cultural pressures supporting them are too strong for an ad hoc method to succeed.

As a professor of computer science who has given a great deal of thought to these issues — and written several books about them — I believe what we all need instead is a philosophy of technology use, rooted in our deep values.

There are many philosophies that might satisfy these goals, but one stands out. I call it digital minimalism, and it applies the belief that less can be more. The key to thriving, digital minimalists have learned, is to spend much less time using tech.

DIGITAL MINIMALISM IN ACTION

Meet Tyler. He once embraced the standard social-media services for the standard reasons: to help his career, keep connected, and provide entertainment. But he later found that his compulsive use of these tools offered minor benefits at best, and he saw that monitoring social media was not the best way to use tech to serve his goals. So, he quit all social media to pursue more direct ways to connect with others.

A year later, Tyler was involved in meaningful volunteer work, exercising regularly, and reading three to four books a month. He was also learning to play the ukulele and feeling much closer to his family.

With his phone no longer glued to his hand, his increased focus also earned him a promotion at his job.

Tyler is quick to admit that he can't completely attribute all these things to his specific decision to quit social media. His choice, however, was about more than a tweak to his digital habits: It was a symbolic gesture that reinforced his new commitment to a minimalist philosophy.

With digital minimalism, one works backward from their most deeply held values when deciding how to live their life. This is the essence of this approach — one *you* can embrace, too.

With digital minimalism, one works backward from their most deeply held values when deciding how to live their life.

The Digital Declutter PLAN

I believe aggressive action is necessary to transform your relationship with technology and reclaim your time and attention. My suggested method is the 30-day digital declutter (plus time for preparation and reintroduction before and after). The declutter acts as a jarring reset: You come into the process a frazzled maximalist and leave an intentional minimalist. This is how it works.

step 1

DEFINE YOUR TECH RULES

During your 30-day declutter, the plan is for you to take a break from “optional technologies.” The first step, therefore, is to define which technologies are optional for you.

When I say “technologies,” I’m not talking about your microwave, radio, or electric toothbrush. I’m referring to the class of things that may be considered *new* technologies — apps, websites, and related digital tools delivered through a computer screen or mobile phone — and are meant to entertain, inform, or connect. Text messaging, Instagram, and Reddit are examples of things you’ll evaluate when preparing for a digital declutter.

Start by identifying which technologies are most relevant for you, then decide which of them are optional enough that you can take a 30-day break from them. My general guideline: Consider a technology optional unless its temporary removal would harm or significantly disrupt the daily operation of your professional or personal life.

If you stop checking your work email, for example, this will harm your career, so you can’t use this exercise as an excuse to shut down your inbox for a month.

If your job occasionally requires you to monitor social media, or your daughter uses text messaging to let you know when she’s ready to be picked up from soccer, or your relationship with a spouse overseas depends on daily connections through FaceTime, then these would not be considered optional — but only when the technology is used for these specific purposes.

For borderline cases, I recommend developing some operating procedures. These will help you specify exactly how and when you will use a particular technology, allowing you to maintain some critical uses without having to default to unrestricted access. You could decide, for example, that you will text only with your daughter, and only when she is at soccer.

Keep in mind that just because something is convenient doesn’t mean it’s critical. A Facebook group that announces social events might be convenient, but choosing not to receive those messages won’t cause any critical damage to your social life in 30 days, and it might expose you to interesting alternative uses for your time.

Such inconveniences might even prove useful. Losing light contact with certain people can help clarify which relationships were real in the first place and strengthen your relationships with those who remain.

KEY POINTS

- **The digital declutter focuses primarily on apps, sites, and digital tools.** According to participants in the original digital-declutter challenge that I hosted, video games and streaming video could be in this category, too.
- **This will be a 30-day break from those technologies you determine are optional.** In some cases, you’ll abstain altogether; in others, you may specify a set of operating procedures that dictate exactly how and when you’ll use the technology.
- **Write down your list of banned technologies and relevant operating procedures.** Put it somewhere you’ll see it every day. Clarity in what you’re allowed and not allowed to do during the declutter will prove key to its success.



TAKE A 30-DAY TECH BREAK

step

Now it's time to make the break. You're likely to find these days without optional tech challenging at first. Your mind has developed certain expectations about distractions and entertainment. Disrupting those expectations can feel unpleasant, like a detox.

Yet the detox experience is important; it will help you make smarter decisions about reintroducing some optional technologies when the break ends. Without the clarity that detox provides, the addictive pull of the technologies would bias your decisions.

For example, if you were to decide to reform your relationship with Instagram right this minute, your

decision about what role it should play in your life would likely be much weaker than if you'd spent 30 days without it before choosing how to use it more deliberately.

Still, it's a mistake to think of a digital declutter as *only* a detox experience. The goal here is not simply to give yourself a break from tech, but to spark a permanent transformation of your digital life.

To achieve real transformation, you must also spend this period rediscovering what's important to you in your analog life. You're more likely to successfully reduce the role of your digital tools if you cultivate high-quality alternatives to their easy distractions.

Many people find that their compulsive phone use covers a void created by the lack of a well-developed leisure life, for example. But reducing phone use without also filling the void with enjoyable things can feel unpleasantly stale, and that will undermine any transition to digital minimalism.

Here's the good news: Participants in the declutter experiment found it easier than they had expected to reconnect to the activities they'd enjoyed before they were subverted by their screens.

Unaiza is a graduate student who used to spend her evenings browsing Reddit. During her declutter, she redirected this time toward reading books she borrowed from the library. "I finished eight and a half books that month," she told me. "I could never have thought about doing that before."

An insurance agent named Melissa finished "only" three books during her 30 days, but she also organized her wardrobe, set up dinners with friends, and scheduled more face-to-face conversations with her brother.

Kushboo finished five books during his declutter — the first he'd voluntarily read in three years. Caleb's search for analog activities led him to start journaling before bed each night. He also started listening to records on a record player, from beginning to end, with no earbuds in his ears or skip buttons to tap when antsy — which turned out to be a much richer experience than his normal habit of firing up Spotify and seeking out the perfect track.

KEY POINTS

- **The first week or two, you'll probably find yourself fighting urges to check your optional technologies.** This struggle will pass, though, and it will help you make better decisions at the end of the declutter.
- **The goal is not simply to enjoy time away from technologies; it's to explore higher-quality pursuits to fill the time the technologies currently take up.** This period should be one of vigorous activity and experimentation.
- **Aim to arrive at the end of the declutter having discovered the activities that generate real satisfaction,** and feeling enabled to confidently craft a better life — one where technology serves a supporting role for more meaningful ends.

3 step

REINTRODUCE MEANINGFUL TECH

After your 30-day break comes the final step: reintroduction. This step is more demanding than you might think.

The goal is to start from a blank slate created by the 30-day declutter and let back into your life only those technologies that pass your strict minimalist standards. The care you take here will determine whether this process sparks lasting change.

For each technology, ask yourself some screening

questions. The first: *Does this directly support something I really value?* This is the most important factor for deciding whether you should let it back into your life.

The fact that a tool may offer *some* value is irrelevant — the digital minimalist deploys technology to serve their specific values and is happy to miss out on everything else. For example, you may learn that browsing Twitter doesn't provide value, but following your cousin's baby photos on Instagram does support the value you place on family.

If a technology passes this first question, it must now face a more difficult standard: *Is this technology the best way to support this value?*

We often justify technologies that tyrannize our time and attention with some tangential connection to something we care about. Consider, for example, following your cousin on Instagram. Although a follow might initially be justified by your deep value of family, the next question asks if Instagram is the *best* way to support this value. Probably not. Something as simple as a monthly phone call with this cousin may be much better for your bond.

If a technology makes it through both screening questions, there's one more to ask: *How will I now use this technology to maximize its value and minimize its harms?*

Many attention-economy companies want you to think about their services in a binary way: Either you use them or you don't. This allows them to entice you into their ecosystem with some feature you find important; then, once you're a user, they deploy attention engineering to overwhelm you with options, trying to keep you engaging with their service well beyond your original purpose.

Digital minimalists avoid this trap by maintaining standard operating procedures that dictate when and how they use their digital tools. Instead of saying, "I use Facebook because it helps my social life," they would offer something more specific: "I check Facebook each Saturday

on my computer to see what my close friends and family are up to; I don't have the app on my phone; I culled my list of friends down to just meaningful relationships."

Here are some ways declutter participants meaningfully reintroduced tech: A digital advertiser named Ilona set up a regular schedule for calling and texting her friends. This supported her relationships by replacing lightweight check-ins with more intentional communications.

Abby, who works in the travel industry, removed the web browser from her phone. "I figured I didn't need to know the answer to everything instantly," she said. She also bought a paper notebook to jot down ideas when she's bored on the train.

Caleb set a curfew for his phone; he can't use it between 9 p.m. and 7 a.m. A computer engineer named Ron allows himself only two websites to check routinely — a big improvement over the 40 or so sites he used to cycle through.

KEY POINTS

• **Your monthlong break from optional technologies resets your digital life.** You can now rebuild it from scratch in a much more intentional and minimalist manner. To do so, apply a three-step technology filter to any tool you might reintroduce. The tool must . . .

1. Serve something you deeply value. (Offering *some* benefit is not enough.)
2. Be the *best* way to serve this value. (If not, choose something better.)
3. Have a role in your life that is constrained by some standard operating procedure that specifies when and how you use it.

• **This process will help you cultivate a digital life in which optional technologies serve your deeply held values instead of subverting them.** Careful reintroduction will help you make the intentional decisions that will define you as a digital minimalist. 🗝

CAL NEWPORT, PHD, is an associate professor of computer science at Georgetown University.

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THE TRIALS



TRIBULATIONS OF THE





EVERYDAY ATHLETE

We often push our bodies to their limits — and that’s not always a good thing. Consider this hard-won wisdom on balancing athletic pursuits with respect for your body, your mind, and your loved ones.



BY **SARAH TUFF**

From the moment I saw the New York City Marathon, in 1997, I was hooked. I was amazed by the breadth of athletes — the powerful elite runners and ordinary people like me — running 26.2 miles. So, I tracked down a training regimen on the internet and, a year later, I completed my first marathon.

The accomplishment made me euphoric, as did all the hard work that led up to the race.

I have plenty of company in my quest to push my athleticism to new levels. There’s been a rise of everyday athletes in recent years: accountants, real-estate brokers, nurses, marketers, and everyone in between who are also cyclists, skiers, power lifters, mountaineers — you name it. They’re all challenging their physical and mental limits as they pursue their passions.

“We thrive off wanting to be better,” explains sports-performance expert DeVentri Jordan, MS, USAW, NASM-CPT. Jordan is the founder of and national director of performance for GameFace Training, a Life Time initiative that develops customized performance programs for aspiring athletes. “People love to win, and they like to find ways to relieve stress — working out and being the best at what they’re doing help accomplish that.”

Nearly 7 million Americans adopted new activities like hiking and biking in 2020, according to the Sports and Fitness Industry Association. The pandemic pushed people to select outdoor sports such as running and cycling, which naturally lend themselves to goal-setting and tap into the intrinsic motivation to keep going — a key element of athletic success.



Sport gives people the opportunity to have community — to belong somewhere, to be a part of something.”



Plus, Instagram and other social platforms expose us to others' incredible accomplishments — and spark our curiosity about our own potential.

More people than ever are now pursuing elite levels of athleticism. Global marathon participation was up 50 percent in the decade preceding the COVID-19 pandemic. Participation in ultrarunning events has grown 345 percent in the past decade.

Other athletic pursuits have grown in popularity as well, including gravel racing, competitive weightlifting, and women's elite-level bicycle racing.

I am proud to count myself among such athletes: I ran more events in the years following that first marathon, even setting the New York state record for the Masters Mile and winning Vermont's Green Mountain Marathon. There was no stopping me.

Or so it seemed.

One day, I found myself barely able to tie my sneakers. Weak, exhausted, and confused, I soon discovered I was suffering from overtraining. It wasn't caused solely by running; I was also working a full-time job, serving as a volunteer firefighter, and raising two children.

The passion to perform had pushed me to my limits. And that wasn't necessarily a good thing.

Pushing the Limits

There is a mythology around elite-level training — a sense of power in reaching and surpassing limits to achieve potential beyond our imaginations. If athletes are modern-day gods, it is a pinnacle of human achievement to stand among them.

But this mythology insinuates that training hard is everything. It doesn't account for the rest of real life — the responsibilities, obligations, and relationships that make up the priorities and stressors we grapple with every day.

Excelling at a sport does not happen in a vacuum. All of the stress in our lives — even good stress — adds up. Whether it comes from physical stressors (exercise load, workload, or loads of laundry)

or mental and emotional stressors (personal relationships or our relationship to the world around us), stress can wear us down. So it's important to be mindful of how you're pushing yourself with your training in light of the cumulative effect of everything else in your life.

Elite athletes and their coaches know this. Stress reconciliation is key to their achievement: They get better because they prioritize recovery. The physical stresses of exercise break athletes down; recovery through active rest, nutrition, sleep, meditation, bodywork, and more rebuilds them better than before.

But how many everyday athletes focus on stress reconciliation? How many even consider the impact of other priorities on training? How many of us squeeze in our training whenever, wherever, and however we can, sacrificing sleep, warm-ups, cool-downs, and active rest in order to train and live — in order to do it all?

It is possible to balance passion for a sport or activity with the responsibilities of day-to-day life without burning out. "The trick," says Ben Walker, a personal trainer and sports-mindset coach based in Dublin, Ireland, "is learning what works for us as individuals, especially as we factor in full-time jobs, families, and life outside of training."

Walker and other experts shed light on the everyday athlete and how to find balance as we lift heavy, run fast, and shoot for the stars.

The Why of Working Out

Balancing our training and nontraining lives starts with developing a mindset focused on why we are working so hard at a sport or activity in the first place.

We seem to love to excel physically. A large part of our adaptation as humans was based on play: using vigorous, lighthearted, and exploratory movement as a source of fun, fulfillment, and purpose, explains Frank Forencich, founder of the Exuberant Animal wellness

organization. Athletics grew from that drive.

Through the relentless pursuit of our passions, we tap into our historic power. For one thing, it's simply fun to perform feats of strength, whether we're competing in an Olympic arena or on our local pickleball court.

But the benefits of pursuing a sport aren't limited to honoring our human nature. The boons are physical, psychological, and social — and your unique *why* may be a confluence of these rewards.

We are made to move, and the gains of physical activity can be felt in every part of the body. Exercise has been shown to lower blood pressure, reduce heart-disease risk, and strengthen the cardiovascular system. Weight-bearing activities like basketball, strength training, running, and skiing are associated with building and maintaining strong bones and muscles.

Exercising also improves our brains, making us smarter, happier, and more resilient. Sport can heighten our alertness and perception, reinforce movement patterns and coordination, and enhance attention and concentration. It aids learning and memory, supports mental health, protects against cognitive decline, and keeps the brain “young.”

Training and competing can increase energy while easing anxiety and amplifying mental focus. Exercise helps regulate cortisol production, making it a useful way to blow off steam and reduce chronic stress.

Other benefits include improvements in gastrointestinal and immune health as well as overall quality of life. (Learn more about all the great reasons to move your body at ELmag.com/move.)

“There are so many positive things that come from this level of discipline,” says Marc Hodulich, an endurance athlete, Ironman triathlete, and cofounder and CEO of 29029 Everesting, which directs participants up the vertical equivalent of Mt. Everest at North American ski resorts.



**The trick is learning
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“On a fundamental level, it feels good to go after and achieve big goals, and for those goals to shift over the course of our lives,” says Barbara Powell, MA, NBC-HWC, holistic coach for Life Time Mind, a performance-coaching program. “It’s quite human to set the bar for ourselves to move toward, and once we get there, to move the goalpost once again, further out.”

Challenges help people socialize and communicate as they complete tasks together or compete head-to-head. They also boost personal skills by promoting teamwork and teaching us to handle pressure and think critically. Practicing a sport or exercising helps build self-efficacy and confidence, as well as patience.

“Sport gives people the opportunity to have community — to belong somewhere, to be a part of something,” says Jordan.

So why is it important to consider the why — or whys — in your athletic training?

“If we don’t know what’s important to us, it can be a lot easier to fall into the trap of what we think training hard *should* be like,” says Powell. “It benefits us to check in with ourselves to determine: *What else do I have going on in my life that requires my attention? How can*

I best integrate who I am, what’s important to me, and how I want my life to unfold?”

The Steep Cost of a Great Thing

The hurdles that many everyday athletes encounter are typically where they were originally experiencing the benefits.

Overtraining is a chief obstacle. That’s because one of the misconceptions of training like an elite athlete is that you push nonstop, which is how many of us run into trouble. We often neglect the real work of recovery and reconciling stress from other parts of our lives.

“Training like an athlete focuses on constantly increasing your aerobic and anaerobic threshold,” says Walker. “This is done progressively through steady-state and intense exercise. This is built up over time so that an athlete isn’t pushing too hard and is still within their limits so they can recover. Pushing too hard becomes a factor when you haven’t built up this threshold enough.”

Training can break down our bodies, as countless everyday athletes discover. Symptoms of overtraining include prolonged and unusually sore muscles, poor sleep, crankiness, recovery delays, and low performance.

We can slip into depression as our energy dissipates, too. “Even elite athletes must honor their bodies, minds, and priorities as best they can. We can be an athlete and be human, too,” says Powell.

Tech can track recovery data and alert you to your needs. Powell, who’s also a long-distance endurance athlete, uses the Whoop band, which helps track recovery with metrics like heart-rate variability.

“I appreciate the wisdom of our individual bodies, which can alert us to signs of overextending ourselves when we pay attention,” she adds. “I have the phrase *temet nosce* — know thyself — tattooed on my wrist as a reminder. When I get irritable or wake up more tired than I fell asleep feeling, or experience an easy-paced run as difficult, those are telltale signs for me that rest is needed.”

Experts agree that there are three key factors to avoiding overtraining.

1. Nutrition. Tracking macronutrients — especially protein — can help you maintain fitness and reach the next level in your training. The International Society of Sports Nutrition and the National Academy of Sports Medicine offer the following guidelines:

- For adults seeking to improve their endurance: 0.5 to 0.6 grams of protein per pound of body weight per day. This equates to 75 to 90 grams of protein daily for a 150-pound person.

- For adults trying to build muscle and strength: 0.6 to 0.9 grams of protein per pound of body weight per day. This works out to 90 to 135 grams of protein daily for a 150-pound person.

(For more on the power of protein, see [ELmag.com/proteinpower](https://www.ELmag.com/proteinpower).)

2. Sleep. Studies have shown that more shut-eye results in better performance. So, instead of staying up late or setting your alarm for an early workout, give yourself the gift of an extra hour or two of sleep. (For more on the benefits of sleep and tips on sleeping better, see [ELmag.com/sleepandhealth](https://www.ELmag.com/sleepandhealth).)

3. Stress management. Stress saps energy, focus, and mood, so we need to consciously manage it. “If you’re stressed at work or home, then you don’t get as good of a workout, because your body can’t perform,” says Hodulich. Adjust your workouts based on your daily stress levels.

Nowadays, when a big deadline is looming, I dial back on my miles, and I go harder at the gym when I have a lag in work projects. Deep breathing and visualization can help mitigate stressors in life. (For more on how stress can affect your performance, see [ELmag.com/scienceofstress](https://www.ELmag.com/scienceofstress).)

The Life–Sport Balancing Act

When we’re training for an event, we everyday athletes sometimes act as if we’re the center of the universe. “Many people think when they work toward a huge athletic goal, everything should orbit around them —



If you’re stressed at work or home, then you don’t get as good of a workout, because your body can’t perform.”



and that’s OK, for a bit,” says Hodulich. “But it’s equally important to look around at the rest of your life.”

The focus on pushing nonstop can take a toll on your social life — and not just because your training schedule might cause you to miss a happy hour or weekend brunch.

“You can become quite selfish,” he cautions. “If you’re neglecting family or business — and possibly even your teammates — that’s the biggest possible downside and warning that something is off. It’s critical to find balance.”

Hodulich learned this firsthand after training for an Ironman competition. He admits to neglecting his wife for six months. “She said, ‘You can choose — more Ironmans, or more me time.’”

A major downside of pushing your body is that you might push everything else away. “You chase that high — the feeling at that finish

line for something you worked six, nine, or 12 months for, and it’s indescribable; it leaves you wanting more of it,” Hodulich says. “At the same time, if you continue to chase it, it can become an addiction.” (For more on this, see [ELmag.com/behavioraladdictions](https://www.ELmag.com/behavioraladdictions).)

A path toward balance involves setting goals that consider all parts of your life, whether that’s relationships, family time, work, or education.

“There is an essential skillset of knowing the difference between neglecting and boundary-building,” says Powell. “Am I neglecting my values for this? Or am I building healthy boundaries to support my values?”

Even Powell says it’s not easy. “Some days I get it right; some days I don’t. I simply do my best to check in with what’s important to me.”

Setting realistic goals can be game-changing for aspiring athletes, adds Jordan. “I tell my athletes we have to begin with the end in mind. Where do you want to be? What do you want to become? And we work backward from there.

“So, if you want to be an elite athlete,” he continues, “we look at what it takes to get there, what our approach will be, and how much time, realistically, you’re able to put into it.”

As for me, I’ve learned over time the importance of balancing my love of fitness with my love of life. I’ve reduced the number and intensity of races I enter. I’ve resigned from some stressors, such as firefighting. And I’ve focused on rest and recovery through good nutrition and my new passion: dancing.

Now, my gym time is mostly reserved for practicing ridiculously fun hip-hop moves to ’90s dance songs, an activity my teenage kids can do, too. And I feel the same sense of euphoria I once felt during marathon training — discovering that the real power and control I have in my life is not so much in my muscles, but in my mind. 🎧

SARAH TUFF is a Colorado-based outdoors, health, fitness, and nutrition writer.

WAYS TO TRAIN LIKE AN ATHLETE

Going all out, 24/7, 365 days a year, is a direct route to hitting a brick wall.

Whether they're physical stressors from a workout, mental stressors from a big work project, or emotional stressors from a relationship issue, stress factors meld to wear us down. "Being aware of the stress in your life and how your body reacts to it can lead to a greater awareness of what rest and recovery is needed for continued resiliency," advises Life Time Mind coach Barbara Powell.

Powell and other experts share advice on becoming a better athlete through cultivating a better perspective on being a human — and not just a human body.



1. PRACTICE RECOVERY.

Rest and recovery are essential for athletic performance. Training breaks down your body, which responds by building itself back up better than before — but only if you give it enough recovery time. (For more on rest and recovery, see ELmag.com/recoveryzone.)

Powell breaks down recovery into three categories: micro, macro, and habitual.

Microrecovery is what we can do in "tiny moments throughout the day to tend to our bodies and minds," she says. This might be pausing to do a breathing exercise; orienting ourselves by drawing our eyes away from screens and toward nature; noticing our posture and making a tiny adjustment; or hugging someone who supports and loves us.

Macrorecovery is what we usually think of when we take a break and rest. "This may be going on a weeklong vacation," Powell explains. "It may be a weekend free of social media or technology. It may be the deload week in training. It is a deep, restorative time away from the ongoing work we are in the midst of — athletic or simply life or both!"

Habitual recovery is daily mindfulness practices, stretching or yoga, cold-water plunges, talk therapy or coaching sessions, gathering with family or friends, nutrition and hydration, proper sleep, and so on. "What we habitually do to support our well-being and recover from workouts and the stresses of life creates ongoing resiliency," she says.

One easy habitual recovery practice is myofascial release, which is great for soothing tight muscle groups, says trainer Ben Walker. He suggests foam-rolling glutes, quads, hamstrings, and the lower and upper back to help lubricate the fascia, which can reduce inflammation and increase circulation and range of motion.

2. FUEL YOURSELF.

Counterintuitively, training can diminish your appetite, making it easy to skip meals. Even without doing the protein math, you can rely on the fact that consuming about 20 grams of protein after a workout promotes muscle growth and repair.

Also, aim for a steady supply of water, which is essential to cellular function, all day — whether or not you're training. (For more on hydration, see ELmag.com/hydrate.)

3. SCHEDULE WORKOUTS.

"Mapping your workouts is key for success," says Walker. "By planning ahead, you can split your workouts and target muscle groups and endurance exercises without missing them from your agenda. You can be organized on your recovery time, making sure you're ready to train body parts again within a 24- to 48-hour window.

"This is important for anyone who's looking to progressively make gains. It also gives you the means to create a SMART goal: By creating a timeline of your workout schedule, you can judge whether a certain goal can be specific, measurable, attainable, and relevant within a certain time frame."

Walker says that creating a schedule and sharing it with loved ones can give you the peace of mind you need to focus on training.

4. PERFORM COMPOUND MOVEMENTS.

Lunges, hang cleans, high pulls, jump squats, and other compound moves can help you not only excel in your sport but also functionally handle the demands of everyday life, explains sports-performance expert DeVetri Jordan.

Walker concurs. "Compound movements are beneficial, as they work two muscle groups at once. This keeps the muscle tissues burning more calories, because more fibers are active. By practicing more compound movements, we can improve our functional health more effectively than doing singular movements. By having the muscle groups assist each other to complete a movement pattern, it promotes better agility and mobility."

5. BUILD MOVEMENT INTO YOUR LIFE.

"Treat movement as medicine and make wise choices to stay active on a daily basis," says Walker. "Instead of driving everywhere or taking the bus, jog, walk, or cycle to destinations during your working day. Instead of taking the elevator, take the stairs. Discover new ways to keep your metabolism active throughout the course of the day." Remember, the primal and primary purpose of athleticism is fun!



The Bigger Picture of Inflammation

Our bodies need inflammation to fight off infection, but too much of it for too long can spur a wide range of illnesses.

Learning to manage it effectively is key.

BY **MO PERRY**

Despite its bad reputation, inflammation is an essential function of the body. Without the immune system's inflammatory powers, we could die from injuries as small as paper cuts and illnesses as minor as the common cold. We simply wouldn't have the capacity to heal.

"Inflammation is an ancestral response that evolved to protect the body from threats and contain damage from infections and injuries," explains Columbia University Irving Medical Center assistant professor Shilpa Ravella, MD, author of *A Silent Fire: The Story of Inflammation, Diet, and Disease*.

The immune system continually monitors the body for viruses, bacteria, and foreign chemicals.

When it spots one, it deploys specialized cells (such as leukocytes) and molecules (such as inflammatory cytokines) to mark and dispose of it.

The four classical signs of inflammation were described in ancient Roman texts as *rubor et tumor cum calore et dolore*: redness and swelling with heat and pain. These are indications that your immune system is fighting for your health.

"Inflammation both brings in the cavalry and sends a warning signal to the rest of the body, saying, 'Hey, I need help over here; come heal what needs to be healed,'" says naturopathic doctor Cassie Wilder, NMD, founder of the Minneapolis Integrative Medicine Center.

Ideally, inflammation subsides once an injury has healed or the threat of illness has waned, says

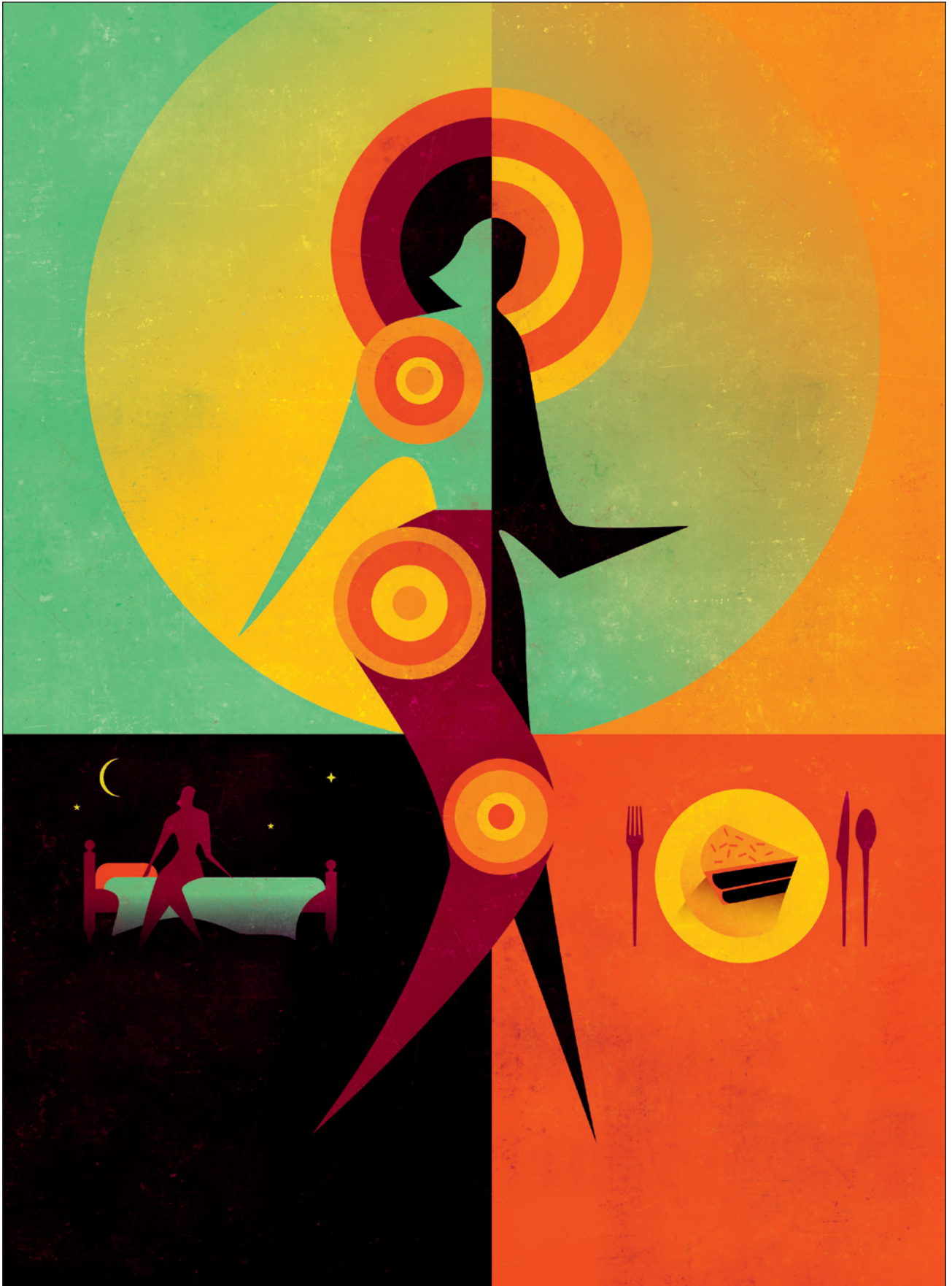
functional-medicine practitioner Will Cole, IFMCP, DNM, DC, author of *The Inflammation Spectrum*. When all is running smoothly, the fire ignites, vanquishes the threat, and quickly dies out.

Yet for many of us, the fires are never quite extinguished.

"Today, we find that inflammation can become chronic and simmer in the body," Ravella says.

"Whether it's overt or hidden, chronic inflammation can have adverse consequences."

Rather than simply seeking to banish inflammation at all costs, learning more about chronic inflammation — as well as the diet and lifestyle strategies that can mitigate it — can help. Here, integrative healthcare experts offer their insights and tips for effectively managing it.



What are some signs of chronic inflammation?

A variety of indicators may reveal ongoing inflammation in the body. Some of the most common include weight-loss resistance, brain fog, anxiety and depression, fatigue, gut dysfunction, joint pain, and headaches.

The signs won't be the same in every person, however. "Inflammation can manifest in multiple areas of the body, but since every person's biochemistry is different, symptoms of inflammation can vary between individuals," Cole says.

Conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, and lupus are what Ravella calls "overtly inflamed" disorders — inflammation-based conditions that can be clearly diagnosed based on tests.

Chronic inflammation can also be hidden, or silent. In such instances, someone may have one or more of the symptoms listed above, or they might feel perfectly well.

Certain tests can gauge general inflammation levels in the body. Tests for high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (CRP) measure levels of this inflammatory protein in the blood; there are also tests to measure interleukin 6 (IL-6), another pro-inflammatory protein. Both CRP and IL-6 have been linked to overtly inflammatory conditions.

Cole also looks at levels of homocysteine, an inflammatory amino acid linked to heart disease, destruction of the blood-brain barrier, and dementia. This marker is commonly elevated in people diagnosed with autoimmune conditions.

High levels of ferritin, an iron-containing blood protein that's normally measured to help diagnose anemia, can also be a sign of inflammation.

The usefulness of these tests, however, can be limited. "These markers aren't always specific — you can generate the same proteins if you have a cold or a cut," Ravella says.

Scientists hope to eventually locate other markers that better indicate whether a body is silently inflamed — as well as reveal the cause.

Still, currently available tests can point toward important avenues of investigation, Wilder notes. "If you suspect inflammation is coming from the gut, for instance, you could run stool testing or food-allergy testing that might lead you down a specific path."

What causes the inflammation response to become chronic?

When the inflammation response gets stuck in the "on" position, it's due to two primary mechanisms, Wilder explains.

The first is the presence of a continuous trigger: This might be an infection, polluted air, other environmental toxins, a disrupted gut microbiome, or excess visceral fat, which can produce inflammatory cytokines. (Notably, the stress hormone cortisol is implicated in the accumulation of visceral fat, which also links chronic stress to runaway inflammation.)

The second is when the body lacks the resources it needs to quell inflammation. "If your immune system is rundown from chronic stress, poor sleep, and a poor diet, your body doesn't have what it needs to go out and fight the inflammation being presented to it," Wilder says.

These two factors — a continuous trigger and lack of resources — can also work in tandem.

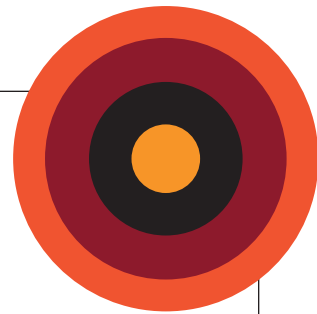


How does chronic inflammation affect the body?

Chronic inflammation creates an abundance of pro-inflammatory cells and molecules in the body, Cole explains. These include tumor necrosis factor, interleukins, nuclear factor-kappa B, prostaglandins, and free radicals.

These substances all play a role in a functioning system, but they cause significant damage when left unchecked. Persistent inflammation can damage insulin-producing cells in the pancreas, leading to high blood-sugar levels and type 2 diabetes.

Over time, inflammation may damage nerves in the brain and spinal cord, contributing to multiple sclerosis. Persistent inflammation in the brain can lead to mood disorders and Alzheimer's disease. In the gut, it can cause inflammatory bowel disease. In the blood vessels, it can lead to heart disease.



What contributes to chronic inflammation?

Chronic inflammation can be spurred by a broad range of factors; identifying them can be key to restoring balance. “If you can discover your own inflammatory triggers and where your inflammation resides, you can learn how to douse it at its source,” Cole explains.

These are some of the most common culprits.

● **LEAKY GUT.** One of the main contributors to chronic inflammation is a leaky gut, says functional-medicine pioneer Mark Hyman, MD. “Having a healthy microbiome allows us to properly regulate our immune systems and to let in the nutrients that we need . . . but it keeps out the bad stuff.”

The microbiome is also key to strengthening the gut lining that separates the contents of the stomach from the rest of the body. “When that barrier gets broken in the gut, all of a sudden, your immune system is exposed to a sewer,” he explains. “That starts to aggravate your immune system, and you start to create systemic inflammation.”

Gut microbes themselves can also produce pro- or anti-inflammatory molecules. Confoundingly, some microbes can do both, depending on the presence or absence of other microbes.

Studies have consistently shown that a healthy microbiome boasts a rich diversity of species. “A diverse microbiome is more likely to consist of germs that will counter — rather than propagate — inflammation,” Ravella notes.

● **DIET.** The typical American diet is another culprit. Neglecting plant foods in favor of too much starch and sugar drives insulin resistance, which in turn can lead

to the development of fat cells, called adipocytes. These fat cells, when concentrated in the belly, produce inflammatory molecules called adipose cytokines. “It puts your body on fire,” Hyman says.

Someone with excess visceral fat may be suffering from silent chronic inflammation even in the absence of any symptoms, Ravella explains. “Visceral fat is churning out inflammation at all hours of the day, even in someone who basically feels OK overall.”

● **STRESS.** The stress hormone cortisol plays an important role in managing inflammation.

But prolonged stress can lower immune cells’ sensitivity to cortisol, weakening the hormone’s ability to control inflammation.

Severe stress can even dampen the beneficial effects of an anti-inflammatory diet.

Studies have shown that people experiencing a prolonged stressful event are more susceptible to an inflammatory (symptomatic) response to a cold virus. And chronic stress is a leading risk factor for inflammatory conditions, including heart disease and cancer.

“Stress can not only dysregulate how your body responds to inflammatory situations, but it also impairs production of glutathione, the body’s master antioxidant, which cleans up the aftereffects of an inflammatory event, such as an infection,” Wilder says.

The stress induced by poor sleep and loneliness is also a well-known inflammation trigger.

“
Having a healthy microbiome allows us to properly regulate our immune systems and let in the nutrients that we need . . . but it keeps out the bad stuff.”

● **SIMMERING INFECTIONS.** Linger infections, such as Lyme, Epstein-Barr virus, or cytomegalovirus, can keep the immune system in a state of inflammatory activation. Addressing the trigger in this case might mean working with a provider to resolve the underlying infection or send an active virus back into remission. (Learn more about Lyme disease at ELmag.com/chroniclyme.)



Which health conditions are considered inflammatory?

You can often spot an inflammatory condition by the suffix “-itis” — think arthritis, dermatitis, sinusitis, appendicitis, bronchitis, myocarditis, etc. Before 1800, only 20 such nouns existed. Today, there are hundreds, and inflammation has been found to be a culprit in many more.

“Anybody with a chronic condition is typically inflamed at some level,” Hyman says. The list includes autoimmunity, allergies, eczema, skin disorders, heart disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes, obesity, Alzheimer’s, mood disorders, and osteoarthritis.

Because chronic inflammation taxes the immune response, it weakens immunity, leaving us more susceptible to infections.

It also increases the odds that our bodies will mount the type of overwhelming attack on infections that does more harm than good; this was exemplified by the “cytokine storm” that killed many people infected with COVID-19 early on.

“Hidden inflammation may shed light on why ostensibly healthy individuals can succumb to severe illness during epidemics and pandemics,” Ravella notes.

How can I manage inflammation?

Inflammation is highly responsive to diet and lifestyle interventions, which can help our bodies cool down and our immune systems become better regulated. Focusing on these behaviors can make a difference.

● **EAT WELL.** “Food is foundational when it comes to managing inflammation,” Cole says. A diet that emphasizes whole foods and includes plenty of plants and fiber supports a healthy microbiome, helps prevent leaky gut, and minimizes inflammatory inputs to your digestive system.

Consuming a diverse array of plants provides gut microbes with many unique fibers on which to feast. “The most critical factors in designing an anti-inflammatory microbiome are the quantity and diversity of plants in the diet,” Ravella notes. “Each plant contains unique fibers, and each fiber may feed one or more kinds of germs, creating beneficial metabolites yet uncharted.”

Fermented foods play a starring role in an anti-inflammatory diet, too. A Stanford University study published in 2021 found that consuming foods and

drinks such as yogurt, kefir, fermented cottage cheese, kimchi, vegetable-brine drinks, and kombucha for 10 weeks led to an increase in overall microbial diversity, with stronger effects from larger servings.

Participants who ate fermented foods also experienced less activation of immune cells and decreased levels of 19 inflammatory proteins compared with those eating a high-fiber diet.

Anyone suffering from joint pain, fatigue, headaches, digestive issues, or other symptoms of inflammation may benefit from embarking on an elimination diet as well, Cole notes. This can reduce inflammatory inputs, giving the gut lining a chance to heal.

After the elimination period, a careful reintroduction process can help identify foods that may trigger inflammation. (For a sample elimination protocol, see [ELmag.com/eliminationdiet](https://www.ELmag.com/eliminationdiet).)

A diet that emphasizes whole foods and includes plenty of plants and fiber supports a healthy microbiome, helps prevent leaky gut, and minimizes inflammatory inputs to your digestive system.

● **SLEEP.** “Prioritize sleep hygiene and getting deep, high-quality sleep,” Wilder advises. Sleep deprivation is associated with higher levels of inflammatory molecules, including cytokines, IL-6, and CRP. This may be one reason people who sleep poorly are at higher risk of inflammation-based conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes.

Sleep deficits also interfere with the brain’s ability to flush out accumulated beta-amyloid protein, which has been linked to brain-cell damage and, potentially, Alzheimer’s disease. An overabundance of these proteins can cause inflammation to simmer in the brain.

Prioritizing sleep allows your natural housecleaning system to get to work throughout the brain and body. (For ideas to improve your sleep patterns, visit [ELmag.com/internalclock](https://www.ELmag.com/internalclock).)

● **MOVE.** People in Blue Zones — regions around the world where individuals tend to live longer and enjoy lower levels of chronic disease — almost universally incorporate movement into their daily routines. “You don’t have to run marathons,” Ravella says. “But in places where people live the longest, they tend to seamlessly incorporate movement into their daily lives, even with activities like walking, routine housework, and gardening.”

Research shows that regular, moderate exercise (walking the dog, biking to work, doing yard work) helps prevent chronic inflammatory diseases, whereas inactivity feeds them. “Dozens of human clinical trials across age groups show that regular exercise tones down chronic, low-level inflammation,” Ravella reports.

It helps reduce inflammatory visceral fat and mitigate neuroinflammation in the brain. It increases gut microbial diversity and decreases inflammatory fat around blood vessels, helping to ward off heart disease.

Exercise also achieves some of its salutary effects by *causing* inflammation. Strength training, for instance, breaks down muscle tissue and elicits an inflammatory response that leads to building muscle.

“Remember, not all inflammation is bad,” Cole says. “That’s why it’s important to monitor your exercise patterns to give yourself plenty of rest between workouts and work your way up to longer or more intense periods of exercise.” Giving your body time to recover between workouts ensures that inflammation can settle back down rather than hover at a low level.

Wilder notes that an anti-inflammatory exercise routine emphasizes low-impact activities, such as walking and yoga, over high-intensity workouts. “People think that unless you can barely breathe or walk afterward, it’s not exercise. But moving and contracting muscles in a low-impact way supports circulation, moves the lymphatic system, and gets [a few] toxins out through sweating,” she says.

Those who do enjoy high-intensity workouts can benefit from mixing them up with low-impact and restorative activities that produce less inflammation. “It’s important to find that sweet spot, because regular exercise is invaluable for calming inflammation,” Ravella says.

Research shows that regular, moderate exercise (walking the dog, biking to work, doing yard work) helps prevent chronic inflammatory diseases, whereas inactivity feeds them.



● **RELAX.** Resolvins are molecules derived from omega-3 fatty acids that help resolve inflammation. Animal studies suggest that stimulating the vagus nerve (the main component of the parasympathetic nervous system, which controls the relaxation response) induces the release of resolvins and boosts anti-inflammatory effects. Research has shown that higher heart-rate variability, a key measure of vagus-nerve function, is associated with lower inflammation levels.

Practices that stimulate the vagus nerve and help promote relaxation include yoga, tai chi, meditation, breath work, laughter, humming, forest bathing, massage, singing, chanting, and cold water exposure. (Learn more about the vagus nerve at ELmag.com/vagus.)

● **CONNECT.** “Loneliness is an intense stressor for a species adapted to tribal tendencies for survival,” Ravella notes. Not only is taking the time to forge and maintain strong social connections good for our mental and emotional well-being; it also has a direct impact on our risk for chronic disease.

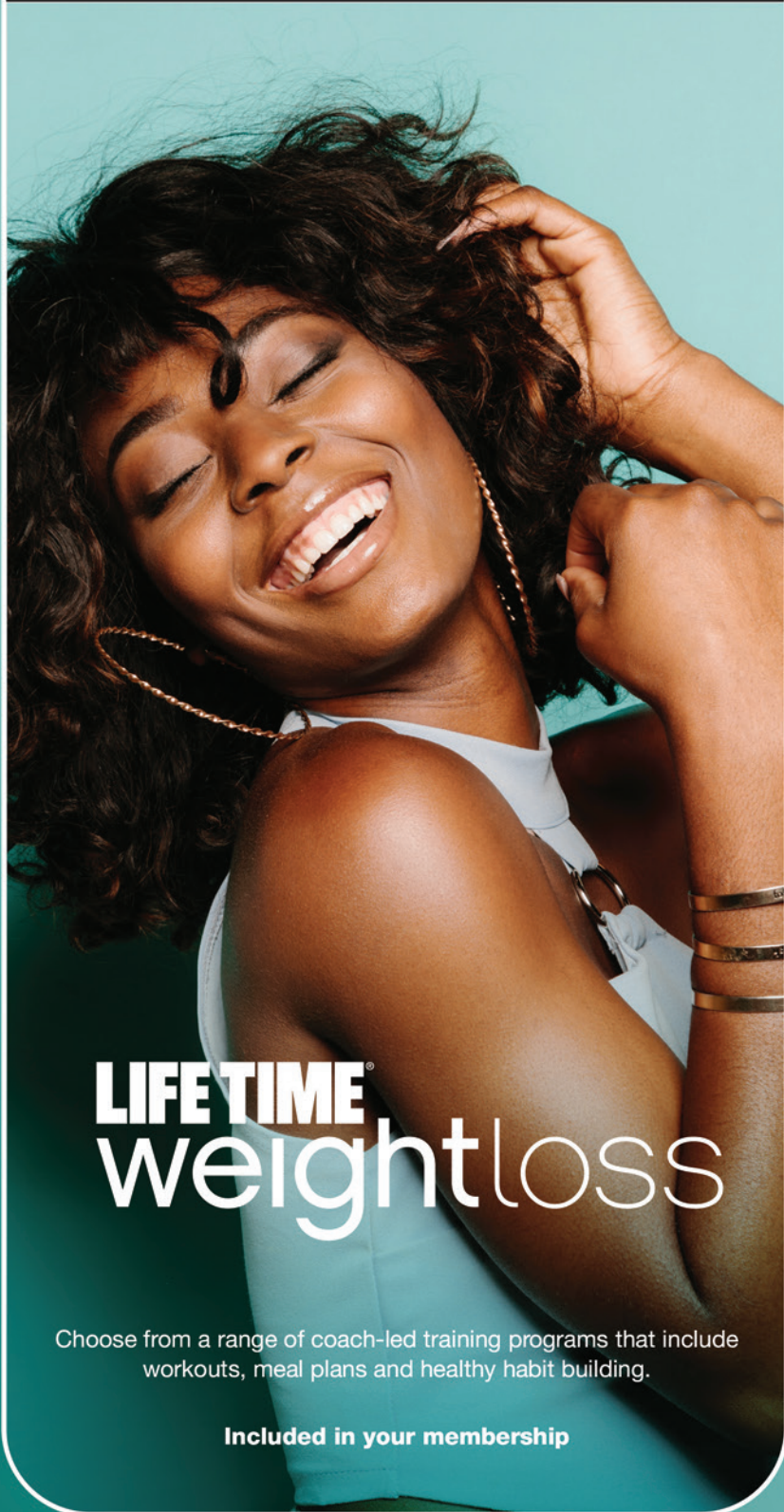
Researchers have explored whether the increased risk associated with loneliness is due to higher levels of inflammation. A recent study of 222 socioeconomically and racially diverse older adults in the Bronx found that those in the cohort who reported being lonelier exhibited higher levels of the inflammation marker CRP. Other research has shown that lonely people are more likely to have an enhanced inflammatory response to stress. (For more on the health effects of loneliness, see ELmag.com/lonelinessepidemic.)

When it comes to cooling inflammation, the important thing is to find sustainable lifestyle strategies that bring you pleasure. Whether it’s eating fresh whole foods, moving your body, prioritizing sleep, or connecting with loved ones, choose a starting point that feels accessible and build additional anti-inflammatory habits from there. ☘

MO PERRY is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

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A photograph of a forest path. The path is covered in large, gnarled tree roots that have grown over and around the path. The rocks on either side of the path are covered in a thick layer of green moss. The background shows tall trees and a bright sky, suggesting a sun-dappled forest environment.

Resilient Life

Resilience is the ability to face life's inevitable challenges and to deal with them the best we can.

— Henry Emmons, MD,
and Aimee Prasek, PhD

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Explore the seven roots of resilience that can help you bounce back from hard times.

Simple Ways to Improve Connection

Our screens often keep us from fully engaging with the people right in front of us. Discover some strategies to show that you're present.



BY **KARA DOUGLASS THOM**

Know what feels good? Interacting with strangers. That's right, researchers have observed that smiling at a random person can improve your mood and your sense of belonging. It's a simple thing, a small gesture. So why don't we all do it more often?

Perhaps because we're too busy looking at our phones.

A 2019 study published in *Computers in Human Behavior* evaluated strangers in a waiting room — some with phones, some without — and found that those without their phones were more likely to smile at others. Researchers surmise it's not that people with phones wouldn't look up if someone tried to engage them; it's that their behavior signals disinterest to those around them.

It's tempting to blame technology for fraying social ties. Nicholas Epley, PhD, professor of behavioral science at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, believes that the bigger problem may be with us. After all, he says, in certain settings, people have always been reluctant to engage with one another.

As an example, he points to the work of social psychologist Stanley Milgram, PhD, whose research more than 50 years ago included sending his students to interact with strangers

on the subway. Even before mobile phones, people often preferred to keep to themselves.

Similar behavior continues today, often to our detriment. Epley's recent research observed participants commuting on trains and buses. Some were instructed to interact with others, and some were not. Although participants in both camps expected to prefer solitude, those who made connections reported a more positive experience.

Assuming that others prefer to be left alone prevents us from reaching out. Our misunderstanding, Epley explains, keeps us from socializing enough for our own well-being.

Embracing "Micro-Moments"

Epley believes we miss out on a lot of happiness by not engaging when among fellow humans. Too many of us will feel a sense of appreciation for someone but not share it, or we'll overhear a kind word about someone but neglect to pass it on.

"It doesn't take more time or energy," he says. "In fact, it can give you energy, but people undervalue how positive these experiences can be."

What's more, Barbara Fredrickson, PhD, notes that when we forgo such opportunities, we deny ourselves the chance to love and be loved.

In her book *Love 2.0: Creating Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection*, Fredrickson challenges us to reconsider what we typically assume about love — that it's exclusive, unconditional, and reserved for intimate relationships.

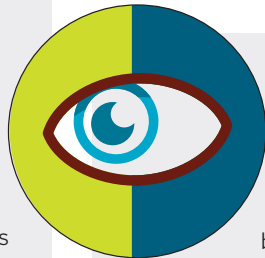
On the contrary, Fredrickson suggests, the opportunity for love is present anytime two people — even strangers — connect over a shared feeling. "Those pleasant yet fleeting moments of connection that you experience with others expand your awareness in ways that accrue to create lasting and beneficial changes in your life," she writes. "Micro-moments like these are those essential nutrients of which most of us in modern life aren't getting enough."

These micro-moments offer significant health benefits, including increased emotional resilience and greater immunity. (For more on how being good to others can benefit your health, see ELmag.com/kindness.)

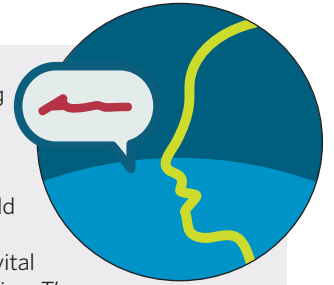
So, how can we prioritize more human connection in our lives? First, put your phone away. Without that distraction, it will be easier for you to read the situation you're in and decide how to engage, keeping in mind that everyone's preferences will vary. Then try some of these other ideas for making connections.



SMILE. Whether you're passing a stranger on the sidewalk or greeting a dear friend, smiling triggers the release of feel-good hormones, unleashing the same pleasure in the brain as chocolate. This is true even if your smile is forced: Moving those muscles in your face stimulates the vagus nerve and activates the parasympathetic nervous system, helping you feel calm and safe. It can also signal to others that you're open to social connection.



LOOK. A 2019 study revealed that eye contact between two people activates the parts of the brain that allow us to process another person's feelings so we can empathize with them. It's a valuable form of nonverbal communication that indicates one's attentiveness to what the other person is saying.



SPEAK. Even among strangers, if it feels OK, try saying something. Make an observation that falls within the context of your environment — the rainbow you've just spotted, the funny saying on someone's T-shirt, whatever comes to mind. It might seem silly, but it could be a micro-moment for you and others.

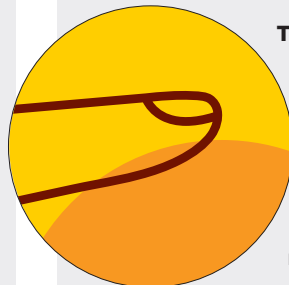
Of course, with people you know, conversation is a vital mode of connection. In her book, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, Sherry Turkle, PhD, writes that face-to-face conversation is our most human and humanizing act. "Fully present to one another, we learn to listen," she writes. "It's where we develop the capacity for empathy. It's where we experience the joy of being heard, of being understood."

ASK. Posing open-ended questions shows your interest in what the other person has to say and increases the potential for strengthening your social bond. Remembering what they say — and circling back with them later — shows that you care, improving your connection.



BE SILENT. Not everyone is wired the same way or wants to engage in the same amount of talking or touch, says Mona Kay, MSW, PhD, founder of *Neurodiverse Love* and host of the podcast by the same name. "Some neurodiverse individuals may have sensory sensitivities that make certain sounds, scents, or types of touch painful or difficult to experience. In addition, a common neurotypical thought is that if you're not talking, you're not connecting."

Forms of parallel play — such as being in the same room while focusing on different things, or doing the same activity in silence (like reading or working on a puzzle) — can also build connection.



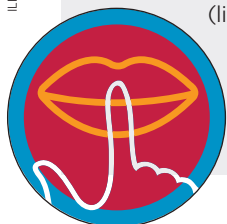
TOUCH. This is not for everyone, especially during a pandemic and especially with strangers, but when you're in conversation with someone you know well, touch is the most literal of ways to connect. It spurs the release of the hormone oxytocin, which increases our sense of trust and bonding with loved ones. Welcome physical touch can also ease stress, lower blood pressure, boost immune function, and improve self-esteem. (For more on why physical contact matters for your health, see ELmag.com/touch.)

LISTEN. Use simple gestures to show you're engaged and present. A nod of the head indicates you understand. Leaning in or vocalizing an "mm-hmm" says you're following what's being said. Zen teacher Ben Connelly believes that our whole-hearted attention is one of the greatest gifts we can offer to someone. (For more ways to be a compassionate listener, see ELmag.com/listeningtips.)



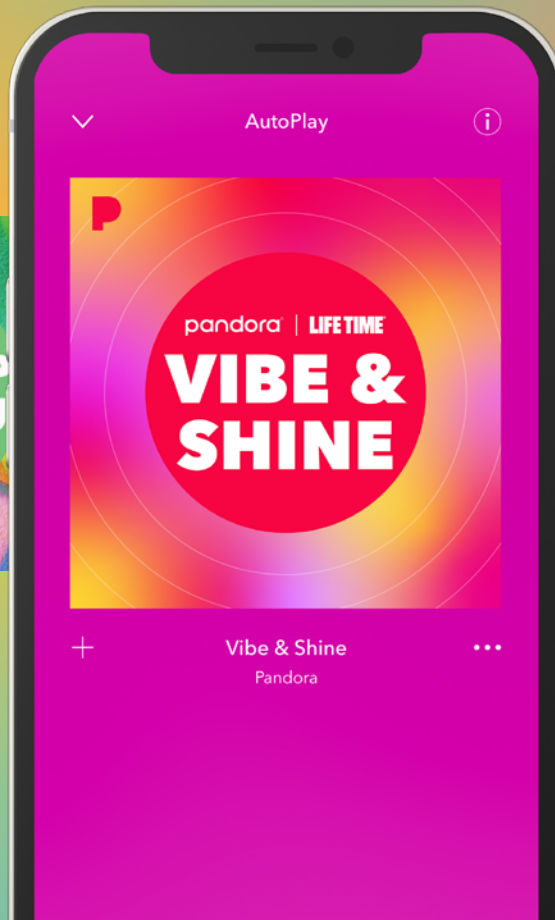
Reaching out to connect with someone, of course, carries a built-in risk; it's not guaranteed to go well. Although less common than we might expect, awkward interactions do happen. When this occurs, don't take it personally — and the next time you're faced with the choice to engage or hold back, err on the side of choosing connection. 🌱

KARA DOUGLASS THOM is a Minneapolis-based freelance writer.



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The Roots of Resilience

Stay steady through hard times with these seven tips.

BY HENRY EMMONS, MD, AND AIMEE PRASEK, PHD

More people than ever are struggling with their mental health, a trend we view as proof that their resilience has been overwhelmed by the uniquely trying times we're all going through.

Resilience is the ability to face life's inevitable challenges and deal with them. If a challenge does knock us down, resilience allows us to get up again and face the next one.

We each have a certain capacity to deal with challenges. Picture it this way: Each of us contains a

little reservoir filled with a magic elixir that nourishes our baseline resilience. This reservoir is a different size for everyone, and the level changes based on a variety of factors, many of which are within our control.

How can we preserve enough of this elixir to stay afloat? Can we replenish it? And is it possible to enlarge our reserves so our roots stay strong and healthy?

These seven strategies can help you keep your own reservoir at least half full — and maybe even increase its capacity.

1. BALANCE YOUR BRAIN CHEMISTRY.

The concept is often oversimplified, but brain chemistry is foundational. The neurotransmitter serotonin may even be seen as a key ingredient of that magic elixir that feeds resilience. Rather than relying solely on medication to manage these chemicals, we recommend simple daily habits that support a healthy brain. Focusing on diet, a few targeted nutritional supplements, and some modest behavior change can often provide better results, with minimal side effects.

2. MANAGE YOUR ENERGY.

Diet and supplements certainly play a role in energy, but we like to emphasize movement and exercise. That's because expending energy in a way that's right for your body forces you to become better at making more energy. It also helps you feel more balanced and less fatigued. Even a daily 30 to 45 minutes of mild aerobic activity, like walking, does wonders for energy and resilience.

3. ALIGN WITH NATURE.

Like all mammals, we live within the rhythms of nature. The most important natural cycle is sleep, but there are also hourly, daily, monthly, and seasonal cycles — as well as those that change over the course of our lifetimes. We can learn from nature how to manage our stress response so that it becomes just one cycle among many.

Nonhuman animals in nature can do this. When they experience life-threatening stresses that cause adrenaline and cortisol levels to shoot through

the roof, their bodies return to baseline almost immediately. (Notably, when stress remains chronic, this can change.)

4. CALM YOUR MIND.

Left to its own devices, the mind can get really busy. It's often called “monkey mind” because it jumps from one branch to another, perching on worries, fears, and regrets. Those branches sap our resilience and joy if we stay perched too long, but our minds can be tamed. With practice, we can learn to reclaim our focus and reclaim the power we have given to our thoughts. Just stepping back and distancing ourselves a little from negative thoughts can help us root down.

5. TURN TOWARD THE FEELING.

Many of us deal with difficult emotions like fear, anger, and sadness in one of two ineffective ways: We avoid, or we overreact. The key is to stay grounded while you experience the emotion — but not get stuck in it for too long. The way to do that is to move directly into it, which may seem counterintuitive. Keep your attention on the feeling long enough to experience it deeply, and then allow it to work its way out.

6. CULTIVATE A GOOD HEART.

This step is about learning to love fully and well. When you open yourself up to compassion, gratitude, lovingkindness, and other heart-based emotions, you grow the size of the resilience reservoir that deepens your roots. The best part about this is that it's no risk and all

reward. You will never regret putting your time and effort into cultivating a good heart; it always pays off.

7. CREATE DEEP CONNECTIONS.

Building and maintaining great personal relationships is key to resilience, but this step is about more than just social connections. It's also about connecting with the deeper parts of yourself — and something beyond yourself, however you think of that.

Think about the metaphor of an entire reservoir filled with the elixir of resilience. Cultivating a good heart is a lot like building a pipeline to access that supply; creating deep connections allows us to draw that elixir out and use it. This might be the single most important thing we can do for our resilience — and maybe for our overall health.

Although none of us can control external events, these principles can hold us steady and deliver nourishment during difficult times. They can support our daily choices and motivate us to make healthier ones. This all will help replenish our reservoirs and ensure that they're full enough to sustain our resilience.

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



ILLUSTRATION: NEIL WEBB

Finding Love in the Digital Age

Dating apps offer a world of potential at your fingertips, but they can also lead to stress and anxiety. Our experts share advice for dating more mindfully.

BY **JESSIE SHOLL**

It's a now-familiar tale: You go to dinner with someone you met through Tinder, Bumble, OkCupid, or any number of other popular dating apps. Things seem to go well — the other person is sweet and charming and seems enthusiastic about seeing you again. Still, a few days or weeks after your date, you haven't heard back from them: Your messages go unanswered, your calls unreturned.

You've been ghosted.

If you've tried online dating, you're in good company. A 2019 study found

that three in 10 adults in the United States have ventured into that milieu. And since the pandemic began, that number has climbed even higher.

Often, these forays are successful: The same study found that nearly 60 percent of online daters reported positive experiences. If you're looking to make a romantic connection, it's easy to think that "getting on the apps" is the way to do it.

But online dating can involve a darker side, too. Maybe you've heard the horror stories about ghosting,

breadcrumbing, or benching (if you haven't, see the obstacle below for definitions of these terms). Maybe you've experienced some yourself.

Or maybe what started out as a fun adventure has become more rejection-filled and time-consuming, making the search less enjoyable and leaving you feeling burned out.

We spoke with two relationship experts to suss out the sources of stress and offer coping strategies, so your online-dating experience can be more mindful, thoughtful, and rewarding.

OBSTACLE: Ghosting (and benching and breadcrumbing).

Ghosting, or exiting a burgeoning relationship without a word, is a routine occurrence. Clarissa Silva, MSW, a behavioral scientist and the creator of Your Happiness Hypothesis Method, says that 80 percent of Millennials report having experienced it (or one of its derivatives, benching or breadcrumbing) — as have 50 percent of Gen Xers.

"Benching" means putting someone "on the sidelines" but not ending things completely, so you can play the field while keeping the other person as an option. "Breadcrumbing," according to Silva, is "seducing a person into believing that they're in a serious relationship, while keeping that person at bay, with no intention of having a real relationship." Any of these can send even the most well-adjusted person into a spiral of insecurity or shame.

SUCCESS STRATEGY: Stop taking it personally.

Key to moving on after being ghosted, benched, or breadcrumbing is to understand that it has nothing to do with you. Stop replaying events, rereading texts, or otherwise ruminating over the situation. And definitely don't make excuses for someone else's poor behavior; that will only prevent you from being open to a better option.

Caveat: If you simply can't move on without reaching out once, send a message that empowers you. Something like, "I get it if you're not feeling a connection, but I'd appreciate you being direct about it."

Whether they respond or not, you did your best and can now move on with your self-esteem intact to find a better match.

OBSTACLE: People not presenting their true selves. Whichever site you're visiting, you'll get more attention if you include photos, but sometimes those photos enable kittenfishing (also sometimes called "catfishing light"). Kittenfishing, whether it's deliberate or unintentional, involves presenting yourself as different than you really are. This could mean using only out-of-date photos that barely resemble the current you, or portraying an aspect of your personality in a way that isn't quite true — for example, claiming to be a world traveler when you've hardly ever left your hometown.

SUCCESS STRATEGY: Connect via video before meeting.

A video hang before meeting in real life is a great idea, says relationship scientist Marisa T. Cohen, PhD, LMFT, because it allows you to get a sense of the other person with much lower stakes than an IRL date.

Another plus: If you've got kids or need to travel a long distance, there's more involved in just getting to a date. In that case, it's nice to get a sense of the potential beforehand.

Meeting over video will also help you determine whether you're being kittenfished. If you connect with someone based on something specific in their profile — maybe you went to the same college, or you both love zydeco music — lead with that in a conversation. It's not that you're trying to catch them in a lie; you're discerning what you truly have in common.

OBSTACLE: Gamification. It's easy to forget that there are real people behind the photos and to get wrapped up in the "game" of mindlessly swiping through profiles — perhaps you never make it to the dating part, because you're too absorbed in swiping right or left. "Online dating is a wonderful way to meet people because it gives you access to people you may otherwise not cross paths with," says Cohen. "But it does come with downsides, and one of those is the gamification of it. It passes the time, and it becomes addictive. When you match with someone, it's a little dopamine hit for you. It's like any other game app you have on your phone."

SUCCESS STRATEGY: Remember

that this is real life. If you've begun to think of dating as a game and people's photos as avatars, it's time to inject some empathy and mindfulness into the whole endeavor. Remind yourself that there are real people — with real feelings — behind the profiles.

If you've begun to think of dating as a game and people's photos as avatars, **it's time to inject some empathy and mindfulness into the whole endeavor.**

OBSTACLE: Online-dating fatigue. Writing witty and appealing profile text, choosing the most flattering photos, drafting first messages to potential dates — all these things take time and effort. Online dating "gives the illusion of many choices while making it harder to find viable options," says Silva. Fewer options means the odds of a successful date go down, which can damage your self-esteem and affect your decision-making around potential matches. You may find yourself lowering your expectations further than you want to, or you might lose hope for finding a match at all.

SUCCESS STRATEGY: Give yourself a mental

reset. If you find yourself experiencing online dating burnout, take a break. Reconnect with other parts of your life. Then, when you go back to online dating, Silva says, "treat dating like it's a social experiment, like you're collecting data on what you want and don't want." And remind yourself that it's OK for it to take time, she adds. "What other decision takes decades to get right?"

OBSTACLE: Rejection. The fast-paced digital realm means even more opportunities for rejection. Silva warns that repeated rejection can lower your self-esteem and increase insecurity, depression, and anxiety. There's the other side of the coin as well: Maybe you're a people-pleaser who has a hard time saying no to a date request even if you're not feeling it. That can create a cycle of guilt and resentment.

SUCCESS STRATEGY: Accept that everyone gets rejected at some point.

You've had to reject people yourself, right? Though the person was perfectly fine, you just didn't click. Think of rejections like that — for whatever reason, you simply weren't right for the person. You will be right for someone.

"Let go of the need to understand why the person didn't want you," says Silva. "Sometimes we really don't know why the situation worked out the way it did." 🔄

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What Is Emotional Freedom Technique?

How this tapping practice can help us handle stressful moments.

BY COURTNEY HELGOE

We all lose it from time to time. That's just life. But we can develop some tactics to help us move through these disruptions without getting caught in an emotional vortex. Tapping along the body's energy meridians is one strategy that can settle us down — often right in the moment.

The best-known tapping practice is Emotional Freedom Technique, or EFT. It's sometimes called “acupressure for the emotions,” and multiple studies have verified its efficacy for treating reactive stress of all kinds, from test anxiety in students to PTSD in veterans.

The practice is rooted in Traditional Chinese Medicine. This healing approach focuses on blockages in the body's energy channels, or meridians, that can disrupt physical and emotional well-being — similar to a short circuit in an electrical grid.

Points along each of the meridians correspond to both a physical organ and an emotional state. A point on the thumb, for example, is associated with the lungs; a blockage or imbalance at the lung point signals grief. When this energy is balanced and clear, the lungs are linked with a feeling of inspiration and the capacity to let go. (Learn more about the meridian network and acupressure points at ELmag.com/acupressure.)

Strange as it might sound, tapping on these points may help remove these blocks and restore these systems — including our moods and attitudes — to a more balanced state.

How to Use EFT

George Limberakis, LCMHC, uses EFT in his mental-health counseling practice in Salt Lake City. He calls EFT a “here and now” therapy because it can calm an activated stress response on the spot, helping clients manage their feelings when they're especially upset about a recent interaction or event in their lives.

He may also use it to help someone address a difficult experience from their past, especially when a focus on earlier events seems to be the root cause of their present reactivity. This approach can help the client process past traumas, which, he explains, are “encoded into our bodies” and tend to prompt the most emotional charge.

If a client can use tapping to remain calm and present as they describe a traumatic experience, this allows them to talk about it without forcing their body to relive the experience. Doing so can make the difference between feeling too retraumatized to continue therapy and being able to move ahead toward insight and acceptance.

Meanwhile, any one of us can use EFT on our own, tapping to calm a strong emotional reaction and return to a more grounded state. We may not rid ourselves of all our issues this way, but we can manage them better.

And EFT is available to anybody; physical disability is not an obstacle. Limberakis notes that EFT's regulating effects can also be achieved by visualizing the tapping points and imagining yourself tapping on them.

COURTNEY HELGOE is the *Experience Life* features editor.

A BASIC EFT RECIPE

- 1. Identify** something that's bothering you. It can be anything from “I'm upset that I forgot to call my mom on her birthday” to “I'm afraid that I'm never going to recover from this injury.”
- 2. Rate how upsetting** this issue is on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating perfect calm. Write the number down.
- 3. Develop a script** that describes the issue and includes a reminder statement of self-acceptance. Here's a sample: “Even though I forgot to call my mom on her birthday, and even though this really hurt her feelings and I feel rotten about it, I completely and totally accept myself.”
- 4. Tap repeatedly** on the outside edge of your hand below your little finger. It doesn't matter which hand or how many fingers you use. As you tap, repeat your statement three times out loud.
- 5. Repeat your reminder statement** while tapping on the following points in this order:
 - a. Top center of your head
 - b. Inside edge of one eyebrow
 - c. Outside of one eye
 - d. Beneath your eye on the orbital bone
 - e. Between your nose and upper lip
 - f. Between your lower lip and your chin
 - g. About an inch beneath one collarbone
 - h. On the side of your rib cage, about 4 inches beneath your armpit
- 6. Stop and reassess** your stress on the scale from 0 to 10. Repeat the sequence until you've eased your stress to a tolerable level. (Watch Limberakis demonstrate a basic tapping sequence at ELmag.com/tappingvideo.)

Our Digital Carbon Footprint

An exploration into the hidden eco-costs of our digital lifestyles and their roles in the climate crisis.

BY MICHAEL DREGNI

Our digital world today is quick, handy, and tidy. There's little paper waste, and fewer bulky file cabinets and bookshelves are overflowing with reference material; it's all streamlined and contained within the latest sleek electronic device.

Hidden behind the digital curtain, though, is a vast physical reality. It's a euphemism to say your information is "in the cloud": In fact, the digital universe is stored in massive data

centers and flows through a physical infrastructure that requires nearly immeasurable quantities of electricity and water, while also generating heat and greenhouse gases that contribute to the climate crisis.

Digital might seem clean, but it's not green.

Still, one of the great advantages of the digital universe, ironically, is its ability to quickly and efficiently spread knowledge about the climate crisis, calling people to action, explains

environmental activist Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*.

"Since digital is not going away, our job is to make the best use of it we can and tame its nastiest effects," he says. "I console myself that it is a new technology, and perhaps we will figure out how to master it before it masters us, but I am by no means certain. . . ."

Delve in with us as we take a closer look at some of the ecological costs of our digital actions.

Every message we send...

A single text message produces 0.014 grams of carbon dioxide (CO₂) greenhouse gas. While that's a teeny-tiny amount, an estimated 18 million texts are sent worldwide every minute — nearly 9.5 trillion texts yearly as of 2019.

The majority of these digital actions are powered by electricity — and 63.3 percent of the world's energy still comes from fossil fuels.

Similarly, each tweet emits 0.02 grams, but more than 500 million tweets are sent daily, producing 10 metric tons of CO₂ every

day. An email costs between 0.2 and 29 grams, and an estimated 333 billion emails were sent daily in 2022.

Each minute spent on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or other social media generates 0.46 to 2.63 grams of CO₂ and every one of the 4 million Facebook likes clicked every minute uses electricity.

Each day, 4 petabytes of new Facebook data is generated — equivalent to 80 million tall file cabinets or 2 trillion pages of standard printed text. And warehousing old texts, emails, social-media posts, websites, and other digital information bears a cost, too.





Every online search we make...

Digital-tech use accounts for 4 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions worldwide. And while that might not seem like a lot, it's more than is produced by one of the worst climate-crisis culprits: the airline industry. And digital energy consumption is growing by 9 percent annually. "Digital consumption is currently highly polarized," according to a 2019 report by the Shift Project, a French climate-crisis think tank. High-income countries use far and away the majority. As of 2018, each American household owned an average of 10 digitally connected devices and consumed 140 gigabytes of data per month; the average person in India, by contrast, owns one device and uses 2 gigabytes.

Every video we stream...

Video streaming ranks No. 1 among all data flow, accounting for an estimated 80 percent of our use; the rest includes websites, data access, and video games. Videos are stored in data centers and then transferred on demand to our devices via networks, all of which use electricity. Online video streaming emits as much CO₂ annually as all of Spain. Video accounted for more than 300 metric tons of CO₂ in 2018 alone — 1 percent of global emissions. And porn amounts to 27 percent of all online video traffic.

Every file we save to "the cloud"...

Data centers emit 0.5 percent of total U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions. That might seem minuscule, but data centers use as much electricity each year as all of New Jersey, according to a 2021 report in *Environmental Research Letters*.

To support cloud computing, data flow, indexing, video gaming, and the metaverse, Google had 23 data centers worldwide as of mid-2022; Amazon operated more than 125. And they're small potatoes compared with other companies you've probably never heard of, like China Mobile and China Telecom. Data centers globally use some 200 terawatt hours each year — more than the national energy consumption of many countries. They account for 1.8 percent of all electricity use in the United States — as well as billions of gallons of water for cooling the heat they generate.

The good news: Though the amount of data workload has increased by some 550 percent in the last decade, the centers' electricity consumption has risen only 6 percent, thanks to energy efficiency and storage-drive density.

Every Bitcoin we use...

Each digital Bitcoin transaction consumes 1,368 kilowatt hours — which is more than the average American uses in a month. Cryptocurrency is "mined" by computers solving complex mathematical equations that require vast amounts of energy. This, in turn, results in immense greenhouse-gas emissions: as of September 2022, 70.79 metric tons of CO₂ annually — a carbon footprint comparable to that of Greece.

Every digital device we discard...

More than 50 million metric tons of e-waste — discarded cellphones, computers, screens, and more — was generated worldwide in 2019, according to a United Nations report.

Less than 20 percent is formally recycled; the remainder goes to landfills or is shipped to developing countries, where it is harvested by hand to reclaim gold, platinum, cobalt, and other valuable materials. This exposes workers to toxic and carcinogenic substances and contaminates soil and groundwater.

At the same time, lithium and cobalt, as well as rare-earth "conflict" elements that are costly to mine, are rarely recovered. (For more on these so-called conflict minerals, see ELmag.com/digitalcosts.)



What Can We Do?

We're unlikely to switch off all our tech, but we can educate ourselves and use it more wisely. We can strive to use tech *less*. We can opt for solar chargers. And we can seek to recycle rather than just dump old tech. (For ideas on streamlining your digital life, see page 50.)

"Even though none of us are going to be able to show how we single-handedly transformed the whole world, we can become part of a movement, the power of which is far more than the sum of the parts," writes Mike Berners-Lee, author of *The Carbon Footprint of Everything*.

On the flip side, the flow of ideas via the internet has been crucial to awakening people to our environmental distress, says McKibben.

"The digital world has definitely made it easier to organize people to fight against the climate crisis," he explains. "But, of course, it's also made it much easier to distract people from the great issues of the moment, and to confuse and mislead them. On balance, it's doubtless done more harm than good." 🌱

MICHAEL DREGNI is an *Experience Life* deputy editor.

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Pain: A Positive Perspective

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

These pains that you feel are messengers. Listen to them. — Rumi

As human beings, we're wired to seek pleasure. Our lives are ultimately the pursuit of understanding who we are, and connecting with the people, things, and experiences that make us happy.

Pain, however, is an inevitable and significant part of our time here. We identify it in sensations of discomfort, sorrow, and hurt. We describe it as acute or chronic, sharp or shooting. It can appear anywhere in our bodies or manifest as sadness, fear, anger, and grief.

An important concept in Buddhism, *dukkha* is often translated as suffering, as well as anxiety or frustration. Perhaps another way to think of pain is dislocation: Like your arm being pulled out of its shoulder socket, it's a distortion of your true nature, be it physical or emotional.

In many cultures, we're taught to escape from or ignore it — we hope our pursuit of happiness will take us in the exact opposite direction. But no matter how well we live, how hard we work, or how careful we are, pain is impossible to avoid.

Other cultures have a different philosophy, and that is to accept, embrace, and even seek out difficult experiences. They view suffering as a tool or a teacher, an instrument of or a pathway toward enlightenment.

Think about it: When things go well, we rarely stop to ask questions about our lives. We get comfortable, even bored or forgetful.

But when something hurts us, we are pushed out of that mindlessness, forced to reflect on ourselves and

our experiences. Pain doesn't arrive to vex or deprive us, but rather to mature and change us.

There are so many lessons that accompany it. We may start to develop empathy and compassion, gaining new understanding of others' troubles by experiencing them ourselves. Oh, and humility? It encourages us to be kinder and less judgmental, which has a direct influence on how we perceive the world, as well as how the world perceives us.

Pain builds fortitude and nourishes confidence. We can't know how brave or strong we are when only good things happen to us. We discover that we can experience tough times and come out on the other side tougher and with wisdom we didn't have before.

In the late 1800s, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "Out of life's school of war — what doesn't kill me makes me stronger." And then Kelly Clarkson got us all to sing along.

Our relationship with reality shifts when we encounter pain, giving us a new respect for both our existence and limitations. We're reminded of our aliveness, with a clearer lens on the wonders of the world. We often find gratitude for things once overlooked, and novel meaning in what once seemed small or simple.

Once we accept the inevitability of suffering and embrace it as necessity, we begin to understand that, like life itself, it is temporary. We can start to pay attention and become aware of the cycle: We hurt; we heal. We mourn; we mature.

Because along with anguish comes both learning *and* joy: the bittersweet cutting of first teeth; the ups and downs of first steps and first times;

the exhausting final mile of a race and the finish line it hurt to reach; the heartache of endings and last times; the searing pain of losing something or someone we love, which bears some lesson or purpose we may not know in the moment.

Again, the great Persian Sufi mystic and poet Rumi described it better than I ever could:

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

My hope is that we all look at pain with this perspective, make peace with it, and even open the door to it. Because, in time, we will move through it, or it will move through us, and be gone.

But it was there, catalyzing growth and serving as a motivating force: a wind that opened us up for more — the acknowledgment and evidence of our existence.

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



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