

HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL. |

# Experience Life

**LIFETIME**<sup>®</sup>

November/December 2023

## FEED YOUR SKIN

**NUTRIENTS THAT  
NOURISH FROM  
THE INSIDE OUT**

*p. 38*

**URIC ACID:  
A NEW METRIC FOR**

## HEART HEALTH

*p. 62*

## STAND UP

**SIT LESS,  
MOVE MORE**

*p. 56*

## 5

**SKILLS FOR  
DEEPER  
COMMUNICATION**

*p. 50*

# Celebrate THE WHOLE YOU

**Life is an  
adventure!**

**Discover thoughtful ways  
to nurture your body, mind,  
and spirit — no matter  
the circumstances.**

*p. 16*

November/December 2023 \$6.95



EXPERIENCELIFE.COM

---

TEN THOUSAND

**LIFE TIME'S  
OFFICIAL MEN'S  
TRAINING APPAREL  
SPONSOR**

TENTHOUSAND.CC | @TENTHOUSAND.CC





**DAVID FREEMAN**  
DIRECTOR OF ALPHA



KIT UP NOW



# Contents

Experience Life

November/December 2023  
**THE WHOLE YOU**

## Features

# 50

## 5 SKILLS FOR AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION

Too often our conversations get stuck in the shallows, even with people we know well. These strategies can help you cultivate deeper, more meaningful connections with loved ones and strangers alike.

By **Elizabeth Millard**



## In Every Issue

**4 Experience Life Digital**

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

**9 Talk to Us**

**10 Well Informed**

Your calves' role in cardiovascular health; protein needs for seniors; how ashwagandha may improve VO<sub>2</sub> max; the benefits of music for people with ADHD; and more.

**16 Nourished Self  
Real Life, Realized**

Mindfulness trailblazer Sharon Salzberg on living life more fully, obstacles and all.

By **Jill Patton, FMCHC**



# 56

## STAND UP FOR YOUR HEALTH

Moving is a key element for improving health and fitness, yet so many facets of our lives are centered around sitting still — in transit, at work, or in front of a TV. It's time to reimagine the ways we sit and stand with movement in mind.

By **Kelly Starrett, DPT, and Juliet Starrett**



# 16

# 62

## A SURPRISING METABOLIC MARKER

Healthcare providers have long known there's a correlation between high uric acid levels and obesity, hypertension, and diabetes. The latest research now suggests this waste product may also play a role in causing these chronic diseases — and that it may be an important bellwether for overall cardiometabolic health.

By **Mo Perry**



**20 One Healthy Habit  
Make a Micro-Connection**

This month's challenge supports your social health by encouraging positive encounters with others.

By **Experience Life Staff**

**22 My Turnaround  
Creating a Champion**

A Grammy Award-winning opera singer explains how prioritizing his health and wellness set him up to become a champ — on- and offstage.

By **Ryan Speedo Green**

**83 Perspective** by Bahram Akradi

**84 Meditation**



## Departments

### REAL FITNESS

#### 26 The Workout

##### The Simple Kettlebell Complex

Work your entire body with this fast, fun routine that requires only a kettlebell.

By **Andrew Heffernan, CSCS**

#### 31 Break It Down

##### The Reverse Burpee

This playful variation on a classic exercise delivers similar strength and cardio benefits — minus the pushup.

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

#### 32 Up Your Game

##### Wobble Work

Balance is one of the most essential — and overlooked — fitness skills. Discover four tools you can use to improve your stability.

By **Sarah Tuff**

#### 35 Strong Body, Strong Mind

##### Ode to Body Joy

Our fitness editor reflects on shifting her focus from how she feels *about* her body to how she feels *in* her body.

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



### REAL FOOD

#### 38 Nutrients

##### Feed Your Skin

Skincare products fuel a \$21 billion industry in the United States, but integrative dermatologists believe the best approach to caring for your skin starts internally. These nutrients provide nourishing support from the inside out.

By **Catherine Guthrie**

#### 43 Something Simple

##### Spicy Braised Cabbage

This humble plant-based dish is perfect as a side or as a vegetarian main.

By **Grace Kennedy**

#### 44 Foodstuff

##### Fill Your Morning Cup

Start your days off right with our favorite coffee and tea gear.

By **Kaelyn Riley**

#### 46 Confident Cook

##### The New Casserole

Wholesome and flavorful, these plant-forward hot dishes will warm you up as winter sets in — no condensed soup required.

By **Alyssa Shultis**

### REAL LIFE

#### 70 Balance

##### Understanding Overstimulation

We're bombarded with stimuli every day. These strategies can help you find calm in an overwhelming environment.

By **Jessie Sholl**

#### 73 Joy Lab

##### Make Room for Fun

By overcoming the “shoulds,” you can live a more joyful life.

By **Henry Emmons, MD, and Aimee Prasek, PhD**

#### 74 Renewal

##### Invest in Financial Intimacy

If you share finances with another person, establishing healthy habits and effective communication strategies is essential. Learn how to both start and continue the conversation.

By **Jon Spayde**

#### 77 Natural Healing

##### What Is Foot Reflexology?

This time-tested practice uses points on the feet to provide relief from a range of ailments and discomfort.

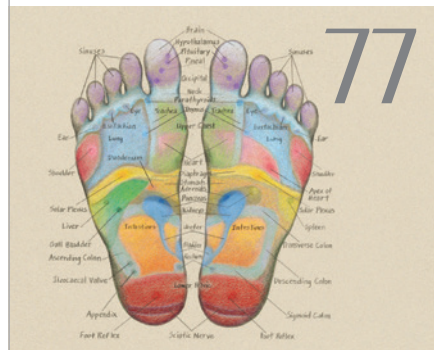
By **Courtney Helgoc**

#### 78 Head Out

##### Deep Roots

Exploring the lands of your ancestors brings a new understanding of your identity and origins.

By **Jill Patton, FMCHC**



# Easy Winter Recipes

As the temperature drops, we're often drawn to foods that make us feel warm and cozy. Yet many of the meals we consider comforting aren't that healthy. If you're looking for new, nourishing meals, sign up for our "Easy Winter Recipes" newsletter. You'll receive recipes for sheet-pan meals, baked oatmeal, soups, and more that will comfort you all winter long.



SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT  
[ELMAG.COM/WINTERRECIPES](https://ELMAG.COM/WINTERRECIPES).

## FREE GUIDE: HOW TO REBUILD YOUR RESILIENCE

Resilience is the capacity to overcome and recover from difficult times — and given our pandemic experience, all of us could use some help honing this skill. Download our *How to Rebuild Your Resilience* guide for strategies (and a quiz!) — it can help you create some space, take a deep breath, and develop the skills you need to bounce back from adversity.



SCAN THE QR CODE OR GO TO  
[ELMAG.COM/RESILIENCE](https://ELMAG.COM/RESILIENCE).

## DIY FACIAL LYMPHATIC MASSAGE

This easy self-care technique can help boost immunity, drain sinuses, and relieve congestion. Check out our video to see it in action.

[ELMAG.COM/lymphaticmassagevideo](https://ELMAG.COM/lymphaticmassagevideo)

## THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF COLD CONDITIONING

Learn how cold exposure and conditioning can improve metabolism and stabilize mood.

[ELMAG.COM/coldconditioning](https://ELMAG.COM/coldconditioning)



## 6 TIPS TO BEAT THE WINTER BLUES

Seasonal affective disorder can make a stressful time of year even harder. Here's how to offset the symptoms of SAD.

[ELMAG.COM/winterblues](https://ELMAG.COM/winterblues)



# RxSugar®

There Is No Substitute.®

Available Every Day!  
Life Time® Health Store  
<https://shop.lifetime.life>

Scan To Shop Now!



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



Ideal for Baking, Cooking, Mixed Drinks & Smoothies  
Add to Coffee & Tea • Use on Cereal, Granola, Yogurt  
Delicious • No Preservatives • No Junk  
Blood-Sugar Friendly • Suitable for People With Diabetes  
Discover Delicious Recipes at [RxSugar.com](https://RxSugar.com)

BE RxBTRAORDINARY AND FOLLOW US! Tag us @RXSUGAR #SUGARREIMAGINED

# Experience Life

BY LIFE TIME

## OUR MISSION:

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

## OUR MANTRA:

HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL.

### EXPERIENCE LIFE MAGAZINE

EDITOR IN CHIEF **Jamie Martin**

DEPUTY EDITORS **Craig Cox, Michael Dregni**

MANAGING EDITOR **Courtney Lewis Opdahl**

FEATURES EDITOR **Courtney Helgoe**

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

SENIOR COPY EDITOR **Mike Oakes**

ASSOCIATE EDITOR/FACT CHECKER **Molly Tynjala**

EDITORIAL INTERNS **Jemima Cooke, Laura Mokaya**

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

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS **Marco Dregni, Henry Emmons, Ryan Speedo Green, Grace Kennedy, Elizabeth Millard, Aimee Prasek, Alyssa Shultis, Alexandra Smith, Kelly Starrett, Juliet Starrett, Sarah Tuff**

EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR **Lydia Anderson**

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR **Jane Meronuck**

ART DIRECTOR **Jennifer Jacobson**

DIGITAL DIRECTOR **Anjula Razdan**

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, DIGITAL MARKETING & MEDIA STRATEGY **Laura Fogelberg**

SENIOR MANAGER-BUSINESS/CIRCULATION **Carrie Stafford**

SENIOR MANAGER-MULTIMEDIA (EMAIL AND SOCIAL) **Tatyana McNamara**

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

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

FOUNDING EDITOR **Pilar Gerasimo**

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

### LIFE TIME

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

PRESIDENT, MEDIA **Kimo Seymour**

Please address all media and advertising inquiries to [ltmedia@lt.life](mailto:ltmedia@lt.life).

### PICTURE CREDITS

Cover: Oscar Gutierrez Zozulia via Getty Images.

Page 4 (top), p. 43, and p. 46-49: Terry Brennan (photographer), Betsy Nelson (food styling); p. 7: Sara Rubinstein; p. 22 (top): Zenith Richards/Met Opera, (inset): Jiyang Chen; p. 35 (bottom): Chad Holder; p. 44 (far right) and p. 45 (top right and bottom right): Terry Brennan.

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

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



EXPERIENCE LIFE Magazine (ISSN 1537-6656) is published six times a year — January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December — by LIFE TIME, 2902 Corporate Place, Chanhassen, MN 55317. SUBSCRIPTION RATE: One year (6 issues) \$27.95; two years (12 issues) \$44.95. LIFE TIME MEMBERS: For member questions, cancellations, or change of address, call Account Services at 888-430-6432 or email [accountservices@lifetime.life](mailto:accountservices@lifetime.life). NON-LIFE TIME MEMBERS: For nonmember questions, cancellations, or change of address, call 800-897-4056 or email [ELFcustserv@cdfsfulfillment.com](mailto:ELFcustserv@cdfsfulfillment.com). Periodicals postage paid at Chanhassen, MN 55317 and additional mailing offices. ISSUE DATE: November 2023. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Carrie Stafford, EXPERIENCE LIFE Magazine, 2145 Ford Parkway, Suite 302, St. Paul, MN 55116.

**LIFE TIME**  
HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE

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



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

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

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





With a simple prompt, we had opened ourselves up to each other — **and I, for one, have felt more whole ever since.**”

## YOUR THOUGHTS?

Email us at [experiencelife@experiencelife.com](mailto:experiencelife@experiencelife.com).

## In a Word

If you've read this column before, you probably know there are many things I love about my work for *Experience Life* and, by extension, Life Time. The team, the readers, the members, the work, the mission — for me, it all adds up to an incredible experience that I feel so grateful and fortunate to call my professional life.

One aspect of my role that I haven't shared much about, however, is my involvement with WELL: Women Empowering Leadership at Life Time. This affinity group is all about supporting and lifting up fellow women, and as a member of the board of directors, I get to help create opportunities for women across our organization to do this throughout the year.

Facilitating the WELL monthly events requires forward thinking and teamwork, so our board meets regularly to brainstorm and conceive new ideas. Most recently, we held our first-ever retreat, where we planned for 2024 while also connecting more deeply, as individuals and as a collective.

During an amazing dinner on our final night together, we got the chance to engage with each other more personally. As I reflected later on the conversation that took place over that meal, it occurred to me that the timing was serendipitous: This issue was in its final stages of production, I was just starting to think about what I wanted to write here, and this real-life experience matched the theme to a tee.

This edition of *Experience Life* is all about celebrating the whole you — including the parts that can be hard to see, tough to acknowledge, and difficult to embrace. Those might be behaviors or characteristics that we consider weaknesses, vulnerabilities, or even negatives. Yet through others' eyes, they are often attributes to celebrate.

Our discussion at that WELL dinner was an exercise in celebrating one another. Earlier in the day, we had all received sheets of paper with “In a Word” written across the top and everyone's names listed down one side. Our board chair asked us to, throughout the day, think about and write down one word to describe each woman in attendance. That night, focusing on one person at a time, we shared what we had come up with.

Giving and receiving those words was nothing short of transformative. For several of us, it was our first time being physically together after years of virtual meetings, yet we *knew* each other. We *saw* one another.

Themes emerged as we took our turns, the explanations behind the words offering deeper insights and creating a stronger web — of validation and connection. We laughed, we cried, and we let ourselves be vulnerable as we celebrated each of us, accepting and embracing parts of ourselves we perhaps didn't or couldn't see before.

As the evening drew to a close, we all knew we had experienced something special, maybe even a bit magical. With a simple prompt, we had opened ourselves up to each other — and I, for one, have felt more whole ever since. If I could bottle that up, I would; the feeling is, in a word, powerful.

During these final months of the year, my wish is that you, too, are able to seek and find that sense of wholeness — even if momentarily. Perhaps it's through personal reflection, meaningful conversation (for five ways to engage in more authentic communication, see page 50), or a bit of fun (for tips on that, see page 73). As mindfulness expert Sharon Salzberg says (page 16), “Find some community of understanding, where you can reflect on what you're going through, where you allow your vulnerabilities to be shown, and where you support one another in truthfulness.”

---

**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.



# Socks loved by pros.

## Pickleball Performance Socks

**OS1<sup>st</sup>**

Official sock of



**LIFETIME  
PICKLEBALL**

*"OS1<sup>st</sup>® empowers me with the tools to have a competitive edge over my competitors and to feel my best whenever I step onto the court."*

*- Pro Pickleball Athlete Jessie Irvine*



**Check your Life Time® pro shop or cafe for product today!**

**OS1st.com**



# Talk to Us



## EMBRACE YOUR BODY

I love and appreciate the practice of moving away from what bodies look like, and I am working on refraining from making comments about how other people's bodies appear ("What Is Body Neutrality and How Can I Embrace It?," June 2023). My struggle comes when someone makes a comment about my body, because I don't want to reinforce the usual stereotypes and acknowledge/accept what they believe to be a compliment about the current state of my body. It's hard to gracefully deflect unwanted comments from others.

**Joann K.**

I really enjoyed your article on body neutrality. I like the idea of going forward with our goals for our body without beating ourselves up. And I like the idea of being grateful for what our bodies can do rather than focusing on what they can't do.

**Delia E.**

The body-standards pressure on males has always been an issue for height ("The Rise in Male Body Dysmorphia," June 2023). Basically, our capitalist/consumer culture keeps selling the idea that who we are needs to be changed and fixed, and that this requires us to buy products and services. We are systematically taught to be

dissatisfied with ourselves and desperate (willing to pay or do anything) to ease that pain.

**Jan B.**

## STRATEGIES FOR THE SWELTERING

With triple-digit heat indices in parts of Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, we're using heat-deflecting curtains on sun-facing windows ("What Are Some Ways to Keep My House Naturally Cool During Hot Weather?," June 2023). And we're zoning off little-used rooms to maximize AC effectiveness in bedrooms and frequently used rooms. Before a hurricane peeled back my roof in 2017, I used to seal it with a roofing substance that dried white. I regret having my oak trees trimmed way back, but in hurricane country it's a trade-off. I dream of living somewhere where it gets cool enough at night that I can open windows.

**Lissa R.**

## FOOD-ISSUE FEEDBACK

I found this short article to be especially interesting and helpful ("9 Common Questions Answered About Hunger Cravings," May 2023). I have had an unhealthy relationship with food and wine for decades. Though I have acceptable weight and body composition, I continuously struggle with food and body image. Frequently, I

wish I did not have to bother with food at all.

**Susan V.**

Thank you for this great article ("8 Tips for Healthy Grilling," July/August 2023). I grill all year long, even in the winter in Minnesota. Using the cast-iron pan is a great suggestion, and using the grill for vegetables is something I need to do more often. I love your suggestion to use a wider variety of herbs and spices — I'm definitely going to change it up!

**Linda M.**

## READER TIPS & INSIGHTS

I wanted to thank you for including the "Be Silent" tip in your article "7 Simple Ways to Improve Social Connection" in your March 2023 issue. As the parent of an autistic son, I was so pleased that you included a tip regarding neurodiverse individuals and that it included ways to build connection in a way that feels best for someone who is neurodivergent.

For so long, the focus has been on trying to get the neurodiverse to act neurotypical rather than for the neurotypical to gain a better understanding of the neurodiverse.

**Erin K.**

My mom, always intrigued by the art of dance, has decided to embark on a new adventure by joining an adult dance class ("The Health Benefits of Dancing," November 2022). With a desire to stay active, embrace her creativity, and connect with others who share her passion, she looks forward to immersing herself in the joy of movement and discovering the transformative power of dance. Regardless of age, talent, or fitness level, what matters is your desire to meet yourself where you are.

**Lily B.**

Once I really started decluttering, it became easier to just get rid of stuff ("The Emotional Toll of Clutter," April 2013). And I feel so much better, because now I pretty much know where everything in my house is — at the very least, I know which room everything is in (even everything in the shed). My husband still needs to get rid of a lot, and I realize and accept that he might not let go of certain things. He is way more emotionally attached to things than I am. We are both bad about the "just-in-case" argument, but him more so than me.

**Kim L.**



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

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

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

# Your Calves and Cardio Health: The Vital Connection

Your heart is the fist-size muscular center of your cardiovascular system. Some 100,000 times a day, it pumps about 10 pints of oxygenated blood from your lungs out through 60,000 miles of veins and capillaries to your farthest extremities.

But your heart gets help from an unexpected source, according to the latest thinking from cardiovascular experts.

You have a “second heart” that plays a crucial role in your body’s circulatory system — your calf muscles.

“One heart pump has enough power to send blood to every part of the body, reaching your lower legs in seconds,” writes phlebologist Sonja Stiller, MD, in a blog for the Center for Advanced Vein Care in Mentor, Ohio. “Once the blood has reached every part of the body, the veins have to carry the oxygen-depleted blood back to the heart and through the lungs, where it will receive a supply of oxygen. However, since the blood is flowing against gravity, sending it toward the heart will take more than a single pump from the heart. For this reason, the body uses the calf muscles to pump blood from your lower legs back to the heart.”

Other leg muscles and your feet also play a role, but the calves are

special, both because of certain properties and their position in the body. Within their system of muscles and veins, calves feature valves that act as trapdoors, opening and closing with each muscle contraction to prevent a backflow of blood.

“The veins in your calf act like a reservoir for blood [that] your

body does not need in circulation at any given time. . . . When

the calf muscle contracts, blood is squeezed out of the veins and pushed along the venous system,”

notes Louis Prevosti, MD, of the Center for Vein Restoration in Atlanta.

“One-way valves in the leg veins keep the blood flowing in the correct direction toward the heart. These valves also prevent gravity from pulling blood back down your leg veins in the wrong direction.”

## The Role of Movement

Exercise is essential to cardiovascular — and overall — well-being. It enhances the health of veins and muscles; prompts the release of chemical messengers, known as myokines, that aid cardiovascular function and fight inflammation; and supports mitochondria, the cellular power plants in our bodies that create energy.

Understanding the calves’ part in the cardiovascular system makes

the role of movement all the more clear. “The best way to improve circulation is to get moving. Every time the calf muscles contract, it helps blood to flow against gravity,” Stiller explains. “If you don’t move for long periods, blood and toxins will collect in your lower legs and cause swelling.”

Sitting or lying down allows blood and lymph to pool in the calves, putting stress on your heart.

There are several easy ways to boost both of your hearts.

- **Take a walk.** Movement doesn’t have to be an all-out sprint to be beneficial. “Even something as simple as taking a walk or doing rigorous household chores does a good job of getting the blood moving,” says Christopher S. Baird, PhD, associate professor of physics at West Texas A&M University. “You do not have to walk for a long time or walk rigorously to get your blood moving. This is different from exercise that is intended to build muscle and cardiovascular strength, which needs to be longer and more intense to do its job.”

- **Schedule movement breaks.** “When sitting, get up every 20 minutes and just move,” advises Erik Peper, PhD, a professor at the Institute for Holistic Health Studies at San Francisco State University.

“If you have to take a long flight, it is a good idea to get up every hour or two and walk up and down the aisle a little,” says Baird.

— MICHAEL DREGNI

“  
The body uses the calf muscles to pump blood from your lower legs back to the heart.”



# Protein Does an Aging Body Good

**Seniors struggling** to maintain muscle mass as they age need only venture into their kitchen to find an ally: protein-rich foods.

Eating protein can help you fend off sarcopenia, which can lead to mobility issues as well as insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes.

“Research has shown that older adults do need a little more protein than younger adults,” geriatric dietitian Katie Dodd, RDN, tells the *New York Times*. “A lot of that has to do with sarcopenia. They need it to protect their muscle mass. I talk a lot about protein because you need it in order to get the most out of your golden years.”

We’re all familiar with protein-rich foods such as fish, dairy, meat, poultry, and eggs, but nuts, beans, lentils, and other plant-based options also deliver the goods. Dodd suggests including these foods in your meals and snacks throughout the day rather than loading the bulk of your daily requirement on your dinner plate. She recommends consuming 1 to 1.2 grams of protein daily for each kilogram of your body weight — 68 to 82 grams for someone weighing 150 pounds.

Paul Kriegler, RD, CPT, director of nutrition product development at Life Time, recommends increasing protein intake for those who are active. “The evidence points to 1.6 to 2.2 grams per kilogram daily — or essentially two to three times the RDA — for exercising older adults with no known kidney dysfunction.”

Making sure you consume enough protein while including regular, moderate-intensity physical activity — especially strength training — in your daily routine will go a long way toward keeping sarcopenia at bay, says Ohio State University scientist Bill Willis, PhD, whose research focuses on muscle protein synthesis.

If you’re unable to ramp up your protein consumption sufficiently with whole foods, Dodd touts whey protein as the ideal supplement because of its high concentration of amino acids. For vegans, she recommends soy, pea, or hemp protein supplements.

“The take-home message for people 65 and up is that you should make sure you consume enough protein and, number two, be active,” Willis explains. “Being sedentary seems to promote sarcopenia more than anything else.”

— CRAIG COX



## Can Ashwagandha Boost VO<sub>2</sub> Max?

**The adaptogenic herb** ashwagandha has been used in Ayurvedic medicine for millennia to aid health and immunity. Now, exercise scientists believe it may also enhance aerobic performance.

Studies over the past 15 years have focused on ashwagandha’s ability to increase VO<sub>2</sub> max (the amount of oxygen your body uses per kilogram of body weight per minute), which is considered the gold standard for measuring cardiovascular fitness.

A 2020 systematic review in *Nutrients* concluded that both athletes and nonathletes who supplemented with 300 to 1,000 mg of ashwagandha daily for two to 12 weeks significantly improved VO<sub>2</sub> max.

Interestingly — considering they started off with higher VO<sub>2</sub> max levels generally — athletes experienced greater improvements from ashwagandha than nonathletes.

Because of the small number of studies included in the review and varied study methods, the review authors note that further research is needed.

Still, the herb may spur sports proficiency in other ways as well. It is commonly used to treat anxiety, reduce inflammation, improve sleep, boost testosterone, and support brain function — all of which can aid athletic performance.

None of the studies reported any relevant side effects from the adaptogen. (For more on ashwagandha, see [ELmag.com/adaptogens](http://ELmag.com/adaptogens).)

— MARCO DREGNI





## Fecal Transplant in a Pill

In April, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Vowst, the first oral fecal-transplant pill. Loaded with live fecal microbiota, the medication is designed to prevent recurrence of *Clostridioides difficile* infection (CDI) after antibacterial treatment.

CDI is among the most common life-threatening bacterial infections: In 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention labeled it an urgent threat. Some 223,000 cases of CDI are reported annually in the United States, and it's associated with as many as 12,800 deaths each year.

*C. diff* can be killed off with antibiotics, but the drugs also destroy beneficial gut bacteria, leaving sufferers more susceptible to future infections.

A fecal microbiota transplant (FMT) of healthy donor stools was originally administered via colonoscopy; the good bacteria then fought off the bad and rebuilt the microbiome in the process. In 2022, the FDA approved Rebyota, an FMT pharmaceutical that is injected into the rectum; the drug is designed to prevent recurrence of *C. diff* infection, according to the manufacturer.

Stool used in Vowst is tested for a variety of transmissible pathogens, but the FDA warns that it "may carry a risk of transmitting infectious agents . . . [and] food allergens."

— MICHAEL DREGNI

# ADHD & Music: Finding Focus With Song

A growing body of research suggests music can improve attention, making it a particularly powerful tool for individuals with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Researchers aren't entirely sure why music improves attention. Some hypothesize that repetitive rhythms hone focus while the changing dimensions of melody and harmony sharpen our ability to switch attention from one stimulus to another.

Yet studies demonstrate music's effectiveness across a range of attentionally challenged populations, including neurodevelopmentally delayed teens, cognitively impaired adults, and traumatic brain injury (TBI) patients. (Former U.S. congresswoman Gabby Giffords underwent music therapy after suffering a gunshot wound to her head.)

Music seems to be especially effective at engaging parts of the brain that function differently in those with ADHD.

ADHD is a neurological disorder characterized by deficits in attention and regulation. Individuals with ADHD often feel as though their minds — and in some cases, their bodies — can't sit still. They're prone to disorganization, distraction, and difficulty following through with tasks that require sustained attention, such as writing papers for school.

Music seems to be especially effective at engaging parts of the brain that function differently in those with ADHD.

When it comes to mental stimulation, the ADHD brain acts a lot like Goldilocks: Too little stimulation leads to boredom and restlessness (which is why kids with ADHD have difficulty focusing in calm, quiet spaces); too much can overwhelm.

Music seems to help ADHD brains find that just-right place, allowing people to settle on the task at hand.

Crucially, listening to music may also help direct the flow of their attention from one task to the next in-

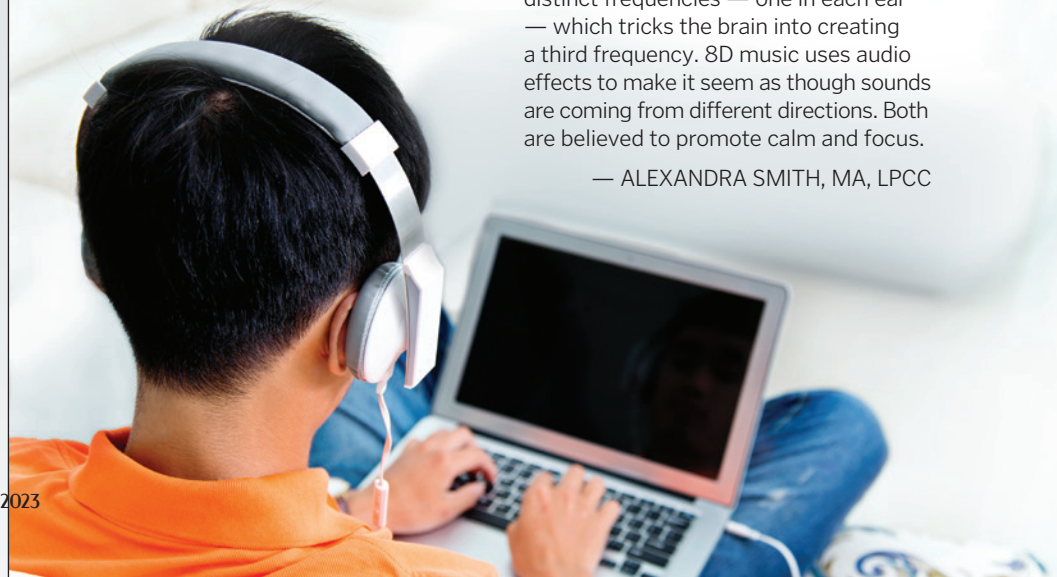
stead of hyperfocusing on a single activity — a common behavior among individuals with ADHD. ADHD brains also suffer from dopamine deficits, which can contribute to mood instability and a tendency toward impulsive pleasure-seeking, neither of which are conducive to concentration.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging studies indicate that music triggers the brain's dopamine-reward response, which may help boost and stabilize the listener's mood.

Certain types of tunes seem especially well suited to strengthening attention. Studies suggest that classical music both improves mood and offers ADHD brains that just-right amount of arousal.

Though the evidence remains anecdotal, some individuals with ADHD recommend binaural beats and 8D music. Binaural beats incorporate two distinct frequencies — one in each ear — which tricks the brain into creating a third frequency. 8D music uses audio effects to make it seem as though sounds are coming from different directions. Both are believed to promote calm and focus.

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC







# Understanding Panic Attacks

**P**anic attacks are abrupt, intense surges of fear and physical discomfort. Though they are usually short-lived, these attacks can be terrifying.

Common symptoms include heart palpitations, sweating, shaking, shortness of breath, chest pain, nausea, dizziness, chills, feeling hot, numbness, disconnection from your surroundings (known as derealization), disconnection from your own body (known as depersonalization), a fear that you are “going crazy,” and a fear that you’re going to die.

Though the attacks themselves are generally harmless, they can result in long-term consequences. Panic attacks may lead to missed school or work, unnecessary medical bills (it’s not uncommon for people to misinterpret a panic attack as a heart attack and check themselves into the ER), or suicidal ideation.

Fortunately, understanding why panic attacks occur and what to do if you’re having one can dissipate much of their power.

## Who Gets Panic Attacks — and Why?

Roughly one in three people will experience a panic attack at some point. Those who have suffered from

trauma or abuse are more likely to experience one, as are individuals experiencing recent stressors, such as a job loss or the death of a loved one.

Women are more than twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with a panic disorder, and individuals prone to negative emotional states, like anxiety and depression, are also more likely to experience an attack.

Ironically, suffering a panic attack can be a risk factor as well. Because they are so terrifying, fear of experiencing another one can cause people to remain on high alert for warning signs. And this kind of hypervigilance only primes the panic pump.

These attacks can be triggered by a known phobia or trauma-related cue but may also come out of the blue.

Though it’s not always clear what triggers them, the physiological

mechanisms that kick panic attacks into gear are well understood.

The human brain is wired to respond quickly to danger thanks largely to the amygdala, a neurological structure we share with our animal counterparts. The amygdala initiates the stress response, a range of physiological changes that can include increased heart rate, rapid breathing, and increased blood flow to the major muscles of the arms and legs.

The amygdala can react to situations it perceives as dangerous far more quickly than the logical prefrontal cortex can. Once the amygdala has been activated, it overrides the calm, rational part of the brain. It takes time — usually at least a few minutes — for the stress response to pass and the cortical “thinking brain” to take over. ☘

— AS

## WHAT TO DO WHEN A PANIC ATTACK OCCURS

A panic attack will eventually end on its own, but you can expedite the process by sending the message to your amygdala that it’s safe to stand down. There are several ways to do so.

- **Breathe deeply** to counter hyperventilation.
- **Place an ice pack** on your face or the back of your neck.
- **Scan your body mentally** to notice which areas are tight. Then try flexing and releasing the muscles until they soften on their own.
- **Move your body** to reduce adrenaline and burn off excess glucose that was released into the bloodstream as part of the stress response.
- **Reorient yourself** to the present moment. Especially during panic attacks triggered by trauma reminders, it’s crucial to engage your senses to help redirect your mind to the here and now. Consider sniffing a calming scent, such as lavender, or sucking on a mint.
- **Use the 5-4-3-2-1 technique:** Scan your surroundings and identify five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. This can help you reorient yourself to your surroundings.
- **Remind yourself** that panic attacks can’t kill you.

### DELVE DEEPER

For a longer version of this article — including advice on what *not* to do during a panic attack — see [ELmag.com/panicattacks](https://www.elmag.com/panicattacks).

# MACH X

Run like race day all day

**HOKA**<sup>®</sup>

HOKA.COM









# REAL LIFE, REALIZED

Mindfulness trailblazer Sharon Salzberg on letting go of fear, anger, and isolation while expanding into states of openness and connection.





BY JILL PATTON, FMCHC

**L**ike many of us, renowned mindfulness trailblazer Sharon Salzberg grappled with feelings of fear and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. To cope while isolating at home in Barre, Mass., she looked to wisdom from spiritual traditions, insights from psychology research, and lessons from a host of teachers and experts.

Salzberg also found inspiration from everyday people who, amid the chaos and grief of the pandemic, rose beyond their own suffering to support others in pain.

“Precious things were revealed during this time — qualities of connection, care, love, relationship, and a sense of belonging, rather than estrangement, in this world,” she recalls.

Salzberg explores these revelations in her latest book, *Real Life: The Journey From Isolation to Openness and Freedom*. She examines the energetic and mental states of contraction and expansion — dissimilar ways of being that either close us to life or open us up to it.

“*Real Life* is about the inner journey — and journeys — we make when we decide to fully live life, whatever the world has presented to us, knowing that life is short and also that life is sacred,” she writes.

We spoke with Salzberg about meeting life’s real challenges with more strength and grace.



*Real Life* is about the inner journey — and journeys — **we make when we decide to fully live life.**”



# Q & A

WITH  
SHARON  
SALZBERG



**EXPERIENCE LIFE** | In *Real Life*, you describe contraction as a state of feeling afraid, limited, or trapped. What else might that closed-down state look like?

**SHARON SALZBERG** | I was using the example of fear very personally, but there are lots of contracted states. Maybe you're enraged all the time or feeling like you never have enough.

But really, it's not so much the state itself — it's not even the intensity of the feeling. You could have an intense feeling, but if you can get a little space from it, that's a different thing.

It's more the way we relate to something when it overcomes us — how we become almost defined by a thought pattern or a mood, a feeling or a desire. Often, we either identify with the feeling, or we are in battle with it. We hate it, or we hate ourselves for feeling it.

**EL** | What are some examples of expansive states?

**SS** | There are many, including generosity, gratitude, love, and kindness. These are all giving states. I reference the research of psychologist Barbara Fredrickson a lot — her "broaden and build" theory is about how positive emotions build up our internal resources.

If we set out to cultivate gratitude, for example, and we write down three things we're grateful for each day, even if they seem small, that gratitude will grow. The nature of gratitude is expansiveness, openness, and inner strength, and the more you cultivate gratitude, the more expansive you will feel.

**EL** | In addition to feeling better, what else can we gain from cultivating more expansive states?

**SS** | Other benefits are creativity and

seeing more options. We are able to listen. We aren't attached to a single resolution to a problem. We're curious and interested, and we have more perspective about things.

We also realize that feeling negative feelings isn't a problem. We can recognize, *Oh, yeah, this is my previous conditioning*. We don't have to reject the feeling or reject ourselves for having the feeling.

**EL** | It sounds like cultivating expansiveness is an "inside job."

**SS** | There are the external circumstances and there are the internal resources with which we meet those circumstances.

We see this in everyday life: If you didn't sleep well last night, and then you overhear an upsetting comment at work, you may feel distraught. Whereas if you did sleep well — and you had a beautiful meal with old friends, and it's your birthday — you may hear that same comment and just think, *Wow, that person's having a really bad day*.

When we neglect tending to our internal resources, we can get caught in habits like taking things personally or feeling incapable of doing. We all have our conditioning, so it takes intentionality to pay attention to what's good. It takes exploration into unfamiliar terrain to realize your internal circumstance is a habit.

**EL** | Could focusing on our own inner state prevent us from engaging with the problems of the outside world?

**SS** | In some ways, cultivating states like gratitude has a bad reputation. A lot of people say, "Well, if you cultivate gratitude, you're being sentimental or you're going to be grateful for little crumbs that come your way and you're not going to seek external change."

I asked David DeSteno, a psychology researcher at Northeastern University who studies emotions and decision-making, about this and he said that's not true. If you're trying to seek change in the system and you practice gratitude, you have more energy. You have more strength, rather than feeling exhausted and depleted.

Not only that, he said that cultivating gratitude creates a strong tendency to pay it forward.

So, it's not that we never try to change external circumstances — we do seek change, but maybe not in such a violent way, with so much dislike and hatred.

**EL** | How important is mindfulness in nurturing expansive qualities in our lives?

**SS** | Mindfulness is the place where we can fully be with whatever's coming up. With mindfulness, space happens and options arise that we would never have seen if we'd been all caught up in contraction.

For example, if you're mindful, you can recognize when you start to feel angry — as the anger is bubbling up, not after you've sent the angry email. You have a balanced relationship to the anger, so you don't get consumed by it. And you don't try to deny it or reject it.

To learn to both see things more clearly and relate to things in a more open-hearted and present way, you need some practice of introspection. Whether that's through meditation or journaling, or through being in nature or in therapy, we need some process where aspects of our experience are being revealed to us — sometimes for the first time, or sometimes just more clearly.

**EL** | What skills help us become more resilient to life's contracting forces?

**SS** | Our biggest engine for growth and change is self-compassion — it's critical. When we buy into judgment, we become demoralized and fatigued. With self-compassion we have the energy to say, "I'm starting over," which is resilience.

Another is perspective, remembering that illness, pain, shame, and fear are all part of life. They're things we experience, but we're not alone and things change. Even if something's perpetual, it's going to have change within it. So, we can relax and experience just one moment of difficulty at a time.

And then there's the act of reaching out, of forming a community, even if it's not many people. Find some community of understanding, where you can reflect on what you're going through, where you allow your vulnerabilities to be shown, and where you support one another in truthfulness. 🧘

---

**JILL PATTON, FMCHC**, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor and a certified functional-medicine health coach.



# Best Day Yet.

## Non-Alcoholic Craft Beer.



[BestDayBrewing.com](https://BestDayBrewing.com)  
© 2023 Best Day Brewing LLC. All rights reserved.

**Chamomile & spice  
make everything nice.**

# Make a Micro- Connection

This month's challenge supports your social health by encouraging positive encounters with others.

BY **EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF**

## WHY

Loneliness is an epidemic, but meaningful encounters with others can support your overall well-being and happiness. While deep connections in your close relationships are vital, even micromoments can improve your sense of belonging.

## HOW

Ask a barista or store clerk, "How are you doing?" and really mean it. Make eye contact, smile, and wave to passersby. Call or text a friend. Mail a card to long-distance relatives. Set an intention to be present in your interactions.

## TAKE ACTION

Small efforts make a difference — for you and the recipient of your kindness. Find more ways to create micro-moment connections, along with community-building insights, at [ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit](https://www.ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit).



# Now Available— Second Opinions

from One of the Top Orthopedic  
Programs in the Country



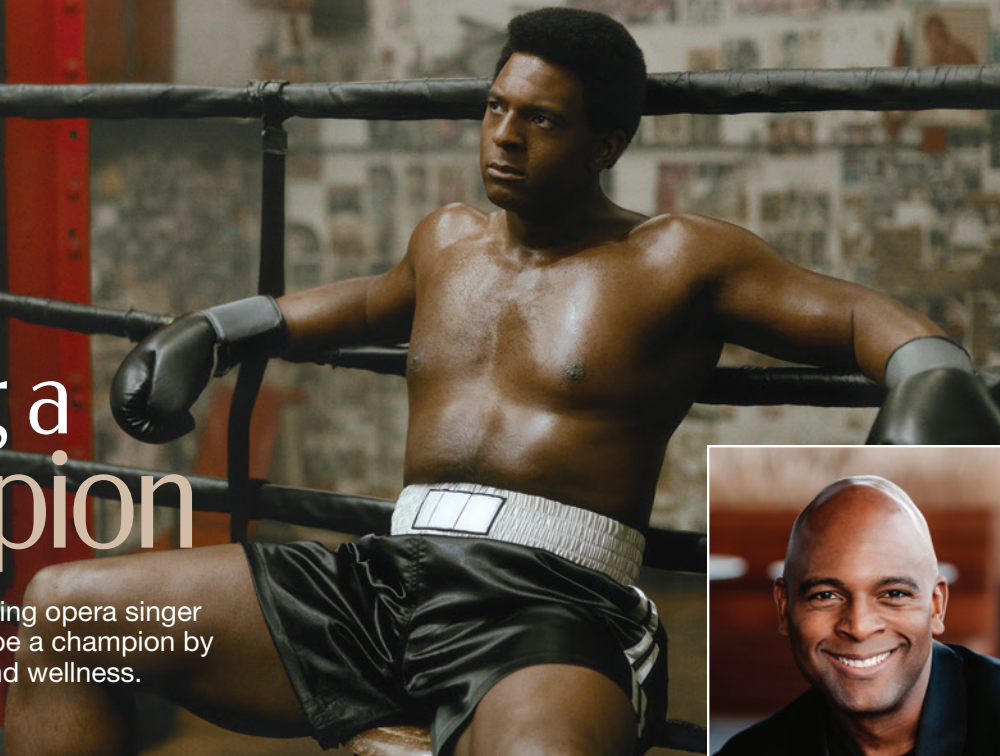
When faced with questions about your healthcare, consulting another medical expert can help you get answers. Understand your options and play an active role in your care with an orthopedic second opinion from NYU Langone Health. Getting started is convenient, easy, and virtual.



**NYU Langone**  
Orthopedics

# Creating a Champion

A Grammy Award–winning opera singer learns what it takes to be a champion by prioritizing his health and wellness.



Ryan Speedo Green played boxer Emile Griffith during the Met's 2022–23 season.

BY RYAN SPEEDO GREEN

I've always been a person who doesn't give up. I was raised in a tumultuous, low-income household in Virginia, where I experienced harder times as a child than I have so far as an adult. But after years of building my career as a bass-baritone opera singer, losing the ability to work during the COVID-19 pandemic hit hard.

In early 2020, I left a salaried position and became a full-time freelance artist. When performing arts venues suddenly closed, there were no more shows, which meant that many people lost their livelihood — including me.

I know many performers who remember that day well. At the time, I was living in Vienna, Austria, where protocols were even stricter than they were in the United States. I lost all my contracts — at least nine months of work.

When this happened, my wife, Irene, was seven months pregnant with our second child, and our first child was 2 years old. I felt hopeless, as if I were letting my family and myself down after all I'd worked toward in my career. I went into a bit of a depression. I didn't leave my house and spent most of my time sitting on the couch doing nothing.

After a few months of this, Irene had had enough of my wallowing. "I know you're better than this," she said. "You've been through much worse. If you can't work on your voice and you can't perform, then you need to work on something else."

Irene encouraged me to start taking daily walks. "Just go clear your head and figure out what you want to do," she suggested.

**Fitness has helped me discover so much about myself and the things I can achieve.**

## Taking the First Step

I was never a fitness guy, or even what a person might call "in shape." I had never lifted a weight, done cardio, or engaged in traditional exercise. And I had never paid any attention to nutrition.

When I went on my first outdoor walk, I barely took 2,000 steps. I was huffing and puffing, but it felt great. I felt as though I were dropping my

sadness and depression out there with my sweat.

After a week or two, I was up to 5,000 steps per day. Then the next thing I knew, I was doing 10,000 steps every day.

Meanwhile, I didn't want to compromise my healthy-movement progress by falling back on old eating habits like avoiding vegetables and consuming a lot of red meat. It was a kind of snowball effect: I wanted to eat better to support my new, healthier lifestyle habits.

Although I'd never been into fitness or nutrition, Irene had always been passionate about healthy living. She was studying for nutritionist certifications in Europe, and I wanted to tap into her wealth of knowledge.

She taught me about her food-and-nutrition philosophy, and we started cooking and eating more meals together. It was something we could share and connect on. I incorporated fish once per week and limited red meat. I made healthier swaps: Instead of eating a hamburger, I would have a chicken burger, for instance.

I felt the benefits of the change in my walks and in my daily life over the next several months.



By that time, it was the winter of 2020, and opera houses were starting to reopen. Because of travel restrictions, many Eastern European singers couldn't get into the United States, so I had a lot of opportunities there. I took on several roles at the Metropolitan Opera when it reopened in 2021. I had more energy thanks to the lifestyle changes I had made, and this helped me improve what I could do on stage. (One of these productions, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, later earned a Grammy for Best Opera Recording.)

In the fall of 2021, I joined Life Time Sky in New York City as the next step in my fitness journey. I liked being around individuals who were also trying to live healthy lives. But it wasn't until a few months later that I would get the ultimate motivation boost.

### The Role of a Lifetime

In December 2021, I was offered the lead role in *Champion*, composer Terence Blanchard's operatic retelling of the story of professional boxer Emile Griffith, at the Met. This was a major turning point in my career — my first lead role at arguably the greatest opera house in the world.

I told Blanchard I was going to take this role very seriously, which meant I needed to get into the best shape of my life. I wanted it to be believable when people saw me on stage throwing and taking punches in a boxing ring.

I had no history with boxing, but the day after I got the role, I saw that Life Time offered beginner boxing classes. I signed up and went to my first class taught by Life Time dynamic personal trainer and boxing coach Joseph Witherspoon. At that first class, I saw a woman throw a punch and immediately knew this was some serious stuff. I had a lot of catching up to do in order to compete with these fierce athletes.

While taking Joseph's group classes, I could tell how much his boxers knew about the sport and how much respect they had for him as a coach. In February 2022, I asked if we could start one-on-one training sessions. He agreed. We worked together five days a week for over a year to make my performance

the best it could be, both by practicing boxing technique and training for strength.

The Met also hired a boxing consultant for the show — former heavyweight champion Michael Bentt. He was with us every day throughout the rehearsal process. It was important to me that he meet Joseph, and when he did, he validated my training plan. By the time *Champion* officially opened at the Met, in April 2023, I was ready.

I knew preparing for this role would improve my body, but what surprised me most was the mental strength I gained. Boxing isn't just about throwing punches; it's a pugilistic chess match. It's one of the most mental-to-physical sports, and it's helped me realize I am capable of so much more than I thought I was.

### Looking Toward the Future

Like with any sport, you need a rest period — even Olympic athletes take time off from training — so I took some time off from exercising post-show. Going forward, however, I have formed a training-for-life mindset. Now that I know what's possible, I have no excuse not to maintain at least half the intensity of my routine leading up to the show.

From what Joseph and my friends at Life Time taught me, I've established a three-days-per-week workout plan. I started running and jumping rope for cardio because these activities put a little less strain on my body compared with boxing. When I ran my first 5K, it took me about 42 minutes. Recently, I've been averaging under 32 minutes, and I'm constantly striving for improvement.

I always knew I was capable of great things, but I never thought I would see definition in my biceps. I never thought I would run a mile in under 10 minutes. And now, as a 37-year-old, I can do that whenever I want. It's an amazing feeling, and I don't ever want to lose it.

I want to live a long, healthy life. I want to be there for my kids and chase them around for years to come. Fitness has helped me discover so much about myself and the things I can achieve. 🏆

# Speedo's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

**JUST START.** "I wouldn't be where I am today if I hadn't started with that first 2,000-step walk," Speedo says. "Wherever you're at in your journey, find one small first step."

2

**NEVER GIVE UP.** "If you want to achieve something, failure and pain are inevitable parts of your story. But I think the key is to never do anything half-hearted and to always keep trying," he says.

3

**KEEP AN OPEN MIND.** Speedo notes that when he started his fitness journey, he was willing to learn, grow, and change. "Whatever you're trying to do, trust the experts who are able to help you, and be ready to adapt."

## TELL US YOUR STORY!

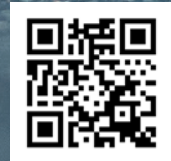
Have a transformational healthy-living tale of your own? Share it with us at [ELmag.com/myturnaround](https://ELmag.com/myturnaround).



# NOBULL



ALL NEW REC TRAINER  
**HIGH ENERGY. LOW PROFILE.**



[NOBULLPROJECT.COM/LIFETIME](https://NOBULLPROJECT.COM/LIFETIME)





# Reed Fitness

Page  
32

“Balance training is important because virtually all movement and physical activity requires some degree of stability.”

— Cedric X. Bryant, PhD, FACSM

**Find expert tips, tools, and exercises to improve this essential physical and mental skill.**

# The Simple Kettlebell Complex

Work your entire body with this fast, fun routine.

BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

**W**hat's a workout that works your entire body, uses little space, challenges your heart and lungs, and requires just one piece of equipment? The answer is simple: a complex.

A complex is a circuit of exercises, all performed using the same implement, without stopping between moves. It allows you to complete a ton of work almost anywhere in a short time.

Move by move, a complex isn't usually difficult — most regular exercisers can perform a squat, a row, a lunge, and an overhead press, for example, without much fuss. But executing the moves back-to-back changes the game: Now you're challenging your work capacity, or your ability to do multiple athletic movements with good form in a compressed time frame. That's a daunting proposition that requires a level of fitness and fortitude rivaling what's required for races or sporting events.

The following complex uses one of the most versatile pieces of equipment you can find: a kettlebell. These rounded hunks of iron, fitted with an ergonomic handle, offer almost infinite possibilities

for the workout aficionado. You can press them, pull them, swing them. You can hold them in one hand or two. You can squat or lunge with them, stand up or lie down with them.

So grab a bell, claim a mat-size plot of floor space, and get ready to sweat.

## GET THE SPECIFICS

For full exercise descriptions and a demo of this complex with our fitness editor (pictured here), visit [ELmag.com/kettlebellcomplex](https://ELmag.com/kettlebellcomplex).







## INSTRUCTIONS

**Choose a kettlebell** that you can press overhead 12 times with each hand. Perform all movements listed below in order, completing six reps for unilateral (single-sided) movements and 12 reps for bilateral (two-sided) movements. Flow efficiently from one move to the next as directed. Do the entire sequence one to six times, resting for 60 seconds between rounds.

This workout is not intended to be a slow grind with rest included in each round. The goal is to complete the full sequence without stopping, so let that be your limiting factor. For instance, if in round four you find yourself needing to stop to rest midway through the sequence, consider that a sign to call it.



1.

### SINGLE-ARM BENT-OVER ROW (LEFT SIDE)

Perform a bent-over row with your left hand grasping the kettlebell. Maintain a flat back and keep your elbow close to your body as you draw the weight up. Reverse the motion with control and repeat for six repetitions.

#### TRANSITION

- Place the kettlebell on its side (its handle touching the floor) near your right foot.



2.

### SINGLE-ARM ELEVATED PUSHUP (RIGHT SIDE)

Assume a pushup position. Rest your right hand on top of the kettlebell, and place your left hand and balls of your feet on the floor. Bend your elbows to lower your chest as close to the floor as possible. Reverse the motion with control and repeat for six repetitions.

#### TRANSITION

- Shift your body (or the kettlebell) so that the kettlebell is resting near your left hand.



3.

### SINGLE-ARM ELEVATED PUSHUP (LEFT SIDE)

Repeat the single-arm elevated pushup, this time with your left hand resting on the kettlebell. Perform six repetitions.

#### TRANSITION

- Stand, assuming the starting position for the single-arm bent-over row, this time with the kettlebell positioned upright near your left foot.



4.

### SINGLE-ARM BENT-OVER ROW (RIGHT SIDE)

Perform a bent-over row with your right hand grasping the kettlebell. Complete six repetitions.

#### TRANSITION

- Stand upright with your feet parallel and shoulder width apart, holding the kettlebell with both hands, using an overhand grip, arms extended down in front of you.

5.

**ROMANIAN DEADLIFT**

Keeping your lower back in its natural arch, your knees slightly bent, and the kettlebell close to your legs, fold forward at your hip joint until you feel a deep stretch in your hamstrings. Reverse the move to return to standing and repeat for 12 repetitions.

**TRANSITION**

- Widen your stance and position the kettlebell on the floor about a foot in front of you.



6.

**TWO-ARM SWING**

Hike the kettlebell backward between your legs. Reverse the move by quickly driving your hips forward, propelling the weight to about shoulder height. Continue swinging in this manner for 12 repetitions.

**TRANSITION**

- Assume a goblet-style grip on the kettlebell, with the top handle just below your chin, and stand with feet about shoulder width apart.



7.

**GOBLET REVERSE LUNGE (LEFT SIDE)**

Maintaining an upright posture, step your right foot 2 to 3 feet directly behind you and lower your back knee until it is just hovering above the floor. Press through your front foot to return to standing. Repeat for six repetitions.

**TRANSITION**

- Without dropping the weight, return to the starting position with feet about shoulder width apart.



8.

**GOBLET REVERSE LUNGE (RIGHT SIDE)**

Repeat the goblet reverse lunge, this time stepping back with your left foot. Perform six repetitions.

**TRANSITION**

- From the goblet position, shift the kettlebell into your right hand. Hold the handle at shoulder height with an overhand grip, with the bell resting on the outside of your right forearm.





9.

### SQUAT TO ONE-ARM PRESS (RIGHT SIDE)



Keeping your wrist straight and elbow close to your body, lower into a squat. Reverse the motion, pressing the weight overhead as you stand up. Lower the weight to shoulder height and repeat for six repetitions.

#### TRANSITION

- Lower the weight to the floor, placing it about 1 foot in front of you, and adjust your feet to about shoulder width.

10.

### SINGLE-ARM SWING (RIGHT SIDE)



Hike the kettlebell backward between your legs. Reverse the move by quickly driving your hips forward, propelling the weight to about shoulder height. Continue swinging in this manner for six repetitions.

#### TRANSITION

- Switch the bell from your right hand to your left at the top of the swing.

11.

### SINGLE-ARM SWING (LEFT SIDE)



Repeat the single-arm swing, this time with the bell in your left hand. Perform six repetitions.

#### TRANSITION

- Raise the bell to shoulder height, with it resting on the outside of your left forearm.

12.

### SQUAT TO ONE-ARM PRESS (LEFT SIDE)



Repeat the squat to one-arm press. Perform six repetitions.

#### TRANSITION

- Lower the bell to the floor with control.



### REST

Rest for 60 seconds, then repeat the full sequence for up to six rounds. ➔



JOOLAUSA.COM



BEN JOHNS

# PERSEUS



**BEN JOHNS**

#1 RANKED PICKLEBALL PLAYER  
MEN'S SINGLES, MEN'S DOUBLES, MIXED DOUBLES



COLLIN JOHNS & ANNA BRIGHT

# SCORPEUS



**COLLIN JOHNS**

#1 RANKED MEN'S DOUBLES  
PLAYER



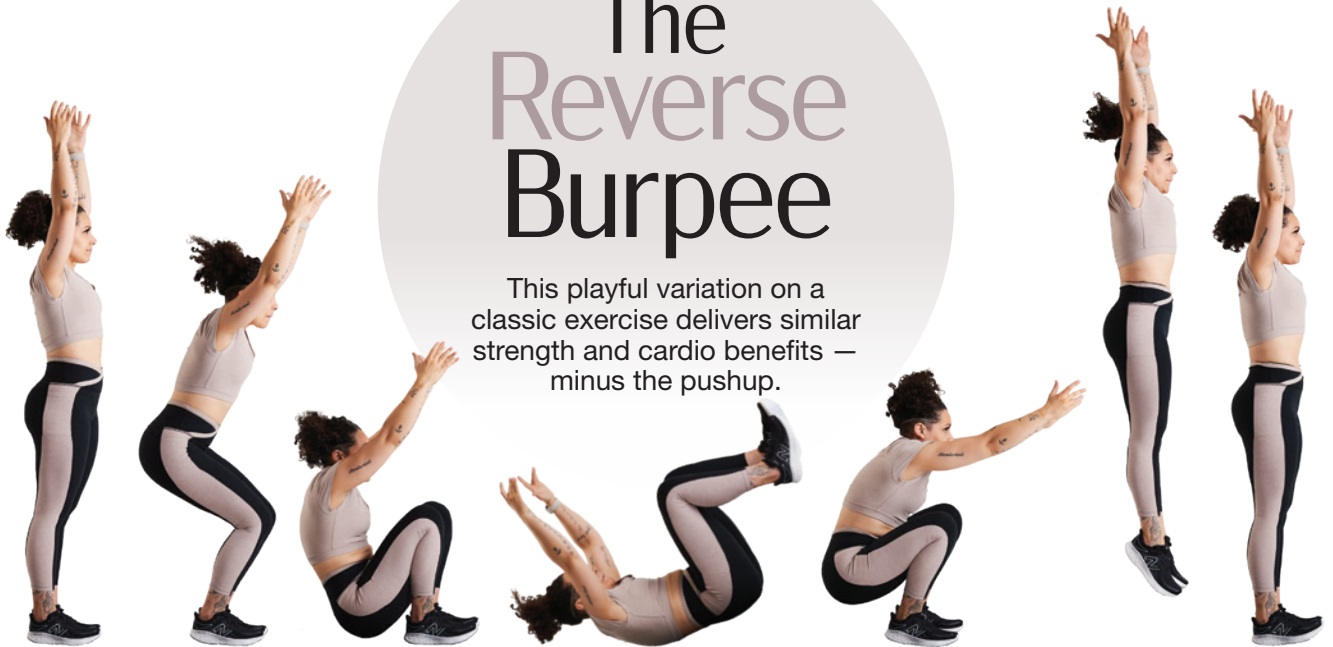
**ANNA BRIGHT**

MLP, PPA, & APP CHAMPION



# The Reverse Burpee

This playful variation on a classic exercise delivers similar strength and cardio benefits — minus the pushup.



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

Classic burpees are one exercise that everyone loves to hate, yet the full-body benefits of this strenuous movement are hard to deny. The high-intensity combination of squats, pushups, and jumps is an effective way to boost cardio and build full-body strength — assuming each piece is done with great form.

But for many people, the pushup is a limiting factor. While taking out the pushup and jumping in and out of a plank is one way to progress the move, the modification doesn't always eliminate sloppiness and the risk of injury.

Enter the reverse burpee: Instead of pairing a squat with a pushup/plank, this variation pairs a squat with a spinal rock, or backward roll.

It isn't *easier* than the original, per se. The squat-to-spinal-rock combo is a no-joke way to raise your heart rate and build lower-body and ab strength.

But by removing the pushup/plank, this version can offer relief to folks struggling with painful pressure on their wrists, elbows, shoulders, or lower back. This makes it possible to move more efficiently and get more out of the exercise.

In addition to its strength and conditioning benefits, the reverse burpee boasts the added rewards of rocking on your back: boosted proprioception in the back-body, improved sense of balance, and increased awareness of how tension and relaxation work together to safely generate power. Plus, it's fun!

Common reverse-burpee pitfalls include improper squat form (allowing your knees to cave inward and shifting your weight onto your toes) and improper rolling form (rolling with a flat back and not drawing your knees in toward the chest). Before flowing the two moves and adding the jump at the top, practice body-weight squats and spinal rocks on their own.

Another stumbling block is the repeated transition from a neutral spine while squatting to a curved spine while rolling. This skill will come with practice — and don't be afraid to use your hands for support, as needed.

Ready to squat, drop, and roll? Follow these tips to get started.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1

**Stand** with your feet about hip width apart and reach your arms overhead. Brace your core and squat down as low as you comfortably can.

2

**Lower** your bottom all the way to the floor, draw your knees in toward your chest, and roll back with a softly rounded spine.

3

**Roll** forward to return to a seated position. Plant your heels and press through your feet to transition back into a squat.

4

**Continue** to press into your feet as you straighten your knees and rise back to standing.

5

**Jump** into the air with hands overhead as soon as you're standing. Perform two or three sets of five to 10 reps.

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

# Wobble Work

Expert tips, tools, and exercises to help prevent injury and improve stability.

BY SARAH TUFF

**B**alance — your ability to stay upright without falling — is an essential physical and mental skill. And yet, it's an often-overlooked aspect of fitness for individuals at every level.

No matter your age or your goals — whether you want to run, ski, hike, cycle, lift, or simply be able to carry your groceries into the house — balance training can help you perform better, stave off injury, and enjoy a higher quality of life in the long run.

“Balance training is important because virtu-

ally all movement and physical activity requires some degree of stability,” says Cedric X. Bryant, PhD, FACSM, president and chief science officer of the American Council on Exercise.

By performing balance-training exercises, you can improve your strength, body awareness, reaction time, and coordination while also increasing resilience to injury.

Additionally, balance training can benefit cognition, spatial awareness (awareness of your body's position to objects in your environment), and proprioception (awareness of your body's movements, force, and location), says Abrea Wooten, senior national education manager at Life Time.

While there's no age limit on these benefits, “balance is especially important for older individuals because it typically declines as we age, making us less stable on our feet and more vulnerable to falling,” Wooten explains.

Whether you're a mountain biker traversing tree roots and rocks or a neighborhood walker looking out for pavement cracks and ice, balance training in a controlled setting can improve your ability to navigate your way around these and other obstacles.

Balance work doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming. In fact, it can be incorporated into your daily life as well as into your existing workouts.

Many health clubs and gyms offer balance-enhancing programming. Life Time, for instance, has specifically integrated unstable-surface training into a variety of its offerings, including its high-intensity Ultra Fit classes and its ARORA training designed for 55-plus exercisers.

Most fitness centers and gyms boast unstable-surface tools (USTs), including the following four popular options. Discover how you can add some balance work into your routine with their support.







### AIREX BALANCE-PAD

A soft square made of dense foam, the pad activates your feet, ankles, legs, and core to maintain a standing posture. The spongy UST is useful for creating an unstable surface close to the ground, making it ideal for balance-training beginners.

To start, stand with both feet planted firmly on the pad. Progress to standing on one leg, closing one eye or both, rotating your head, and moving your arms, suggests Katy Moline, MS, ACSM-EP.

For a particularly challenging — but fun — exercise, stand on one foot and use the other foot to try to write the letters of the alphabet or spell out your name or other words. Make the motions as big or as small as you can control, then progress from there.



### BOSU BALL

Like a stability ball cut in half, a BOSU consists of an inflated rubber dome attached to a rigid platform. This tool is ubiquitous in many clubs and gyms due to its balance-boosting benefits.

One way to use the BOSU is as prep work for strength exercises, says Wooten. Just be sure that before you bring the BOSU into play, you're able to perform all moves on a stable surface with a full range of motion.

For instance, practice doing sets of squats, lunges, overhead presses, planks, and other strength moves on the floor. Once you get the hang of the motion and form, increase the challenge by performing your move of choice on the domed side of the BOSU ball. Allow yourself time to progress slowly — and position yourself near a wall or other stable surface for safety.



### ROCKER AND WOBBLE BOARDS

The names are sometimes used interchangeably, but there is a difference between rocker and wobble boards. Rocker boards, like StrongTek's version pictured above, are rectangular or curved U-shaped boards that allow you to move from side to side and front to back. Wobble boards are round boards that allow you to move from side to side, front to back, and in a circle ("around the world"). Both variations are awesome for building balance skills.

"Even just getting on these is fun," says Wooten. Try performing such lower- and upper-body exercises as squats, biceps curls, overhead triceps extensions, and standing biceps curls. You can also do planks to improve abdominal strength by putting your feet on the board, lifting one arm at a time, and then lifting one leg at a time.



### POWER PLATE

The Power Plate constantly challenges balance by sending multidirectional vibrations through your body as you're performing your workout. "The vibration isn't going to be so crazy that it throws you off your game," says Wooten, "but the connections it can make neurologically, along with extra muscle recruitment, are fantastic. So anything you're doing on the floor" — squats, lunges, plank holds, rows — "you can take onto the Power Plate."

The Power Plate isn't the most challenging UST on this list, but it can be the most intimidating simply because it is a large machine that people may not know how to operate. If your health club has one and you're unsure how to use it, don't hesitate to ask a trainer. 📍

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

## ON SOLID GROUND

You can practice balance training without the help of USTs.

"There's an infinite number of exercises that can be done to improve balance without a single piece of equipment," says Katy Moline, MS, ACSM-EP, who teaches balance classes to older adults.

Moline advises integrating balance training into your daily routine using no more than your own body.

For starters, anytime you have to stand — while, say, brushing your

teeth, washing the dishes, waiting in a line, or working at a standing desk — switch up your stance. Stand on one leg or use a staggered stance with one foot slightly in front of the other. Take this to a tandem stance, where one foot is directly in front of the other, as if you were balancing on a tightrope. Progress by raising and lowering the heels or by closing one eye at a time.

Set your balance work in motion by mixing up how you walk. Take

slow steps forward and backward, holding one leg up before each step. Move side to side while imagining that you're stepping over a sleeping pet.

"It's important to work on balance while standing still and while moving, as well as in different directions — forward and back, side to side — and tempos," Moline says.

Life Time's Abrea Wooten agrees. "We live in 360 degrees, and life comes at us from all angles and speeds."





# MIAMI FAMOUS

LIFETIME®

# MIAMI

MARATHON  AND HALF

JANUARY 28, 2024  
[themiamimarathon.com](http://themiamimarathon.com)

ALTER EGO  
RUNNING

 Baptist Health



 DELTA



HOKA



 Hydro Flask®

TEN THOUSAND

 PROUD SOURCE  
SPRING WATER

MIAMI BEACH VISITOR AND CONVENTION AUTHORITY

MIAMI DDA  
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

 COME PLAY  
IN FLORIDA

MIAMI  
GREATER MIAMI CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



MIAMI BEACH

MIAMI-DADE  
COUNTY



# Ode to Body Joy

Our fitness editor reflects on shifting the focus from how she feels *about* her body to how she feels *in* her body.

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

**M**y first memories of feeling a certain (not-good) way about my body date back to when I was 8 or 9 years old: A doctor pointing to a graph and expressing concern that I was in the 95th percentile for my weight. A friend assigning me the role in one of our backyard sketches of a doughnut-obsessed character whose physique resembled a “meatball with a mushroom on top.” A classmate pointing out that I had “alien” legs because my blue veins were visible.

It’s no surprise that Little Maggie, sensitive from the start, internalized these and countless other messages. She embarked on crash diets, ensconced herself in oversize clothing, and even trained herself to stop laughing in public — anything to become as small and inconspicuous as possible.

My self-perception was underscored by the same message from all around me — people on TV and in magazines, teachers, and family members all seemed to be saying they weren’t happy with their bodies. I was part of a strange and terrible club that gave me a sense of identity and belonging.

I hated my body — how it looked, moved, and functioned — for many years. Until, finally, I had had enough. I was tired of torturing myself, tired of self-hate.

But self-love not only felt out of reach, it wasn’t even part of my vocabulary. Instead, I wished to feel indifferent toward my physical self. To find a place where I could simply enjoy my life without thinking about my body.

In the early 2010s, body positivity and body neutrality were not the strong social movements they are today. When I made the decision to leave the community of self-loathing, I didn’t know what I was stepping into or who I was stepping toward.

So, I winged it. I closed the blinds of my apartment and started spending my alone time at home naked. I smiled at myself in every mirror I passed.

I quit the dark basement gym where I’d spent hours on the treadmill hidden behind a pillar and joined a CrossFit gym, where I learned how to lift weights, marking a pivotal shift in not only my strength but my sense of self. I took myself on “experience” dates to dance classes, hikes, trapeze lessons, and sessions at the trampoline park.

In the process, I landed in a new headspace that I can only describe as body joy — or perhaps joy embodied, for the first time, in my physical self. I didn’t care if I looked silly or if I didn’t nail a new skill on the first try. I experienced a sense of freedom in how I thought and how I moved that at once felt brand new and like *déjà vu*.

The strength of the memories from which my self-hate stemmed had repressed earlier memories of a time when I moved through the world not thinking twice about my body. A time when my body wasn’t the enemy — when my body wasn’t separate from my whole self. Years later, I reclaimed that feeling from early childhood.

I’m not totally over all my body stuff — I don’t know whether I ever

will be. But when feelings of judgment and reproach come up, I now know I have the tools to reclaim my freedom from self-hate. A long walk listening to a great book, a bout of swinging some heavy kettlebells, jamming out in a Zumba class, and jumping on my mini trampoline are all ways to shake out the gross thoughts, reunite my body and spirit — and give me something to smile about.

Embracing body joy has made it possible to pursue performance goals and aesthetic goals in a way that doesn’t detract from my mental health. It’s also opened me up to pursuing no specific goals at all, instead reaping the many rewards of moving my body in ways that feel good and right for me in the moment.

It allows me to leave space for myself — and for others — to show up exactly as we are. In general, I’m far more interested in how I feel *in* my body than how I (or anyone else) feel *about* it.

The best part of body joy is that there are no rules. No requirements. No waiting until I look or function in a particular way. No waiting until I love myself or feel any which way about my body at all. Body joy is available to me right here, right now.



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

# Experience Life

Presents:

## Thriving in the Holiday Season

In this digital-only collection, we're offering dozens of strategies and insights for navigating this busy time of year with more grace, compassion, patience, and, yes, joy!



Available exclusively online starting Dec. 1, 2023.



Scan to sign up to receive an email reminder when this digital-only content collection is available on 12/1.



# Real Food



Page  
46

It's time for a new look at the ultimate comfort food — the casserole. Full of healthy ingredients, these plant-forward hot dishes can satisfy throughout the winter months.

Find the recipe for our Sweet-Potato Chickpea Curry Casserole at [ELmag.com/casseroles](http://ELmag.com/casseroles).



# FEED YOUR SKIN

The most important nutrients for skin health — inside and out.

BY CATHERINE GUTHRIE

**T**he skin is the body's largest organ, so it seems both right and oh-so wrong that it's the only one we watch age in real time.

"Most people never see an aging liver or kidney, but they see their skin aging every time they look in the mirror," says Mark Tager, MD, author of *Feed Your Skin Right: Your Personalized Nutrition Plan for Radiant Beauty*.

Aging isn't the only challenge to skin health. Skin ailments affect more than 60 percent of people, a study published in 2019 in the *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology* estimates. Apart from skin cancer, which affects up to 20 percent of Americans, most of what ails us are hard-to-treat inflammatory conditions, such as acne and eczema.

"Because we can see and feel the skin, it's natural to want to attack problems from the outside," says Julie Greenberg, ND, AHG, a naturopathic doctor who specializes in integrative dermatology. Skincare products are a \$21 billion business in the United States alone.

While topical products can relieve symptoms, they can also mask their root cause. More often than not, Greenberg believes, the underlying trigger for inflammatory skin problems is found in the gut. And the solution is not more or better topicals, but a more diverse, gut-friendly diet.

## Outside In

The gut and skin are in constant conversation, much like the gut and brain. Research suggests that imbalances in the gut's microbiome are showing up on the body's surface as inflammatory conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, rosacea, and acne.

Tager is careful to distinguish between the "outside skin" — the body's covering — and "inside skin," the lining of the digestive tract. The outside skin has three main layers: the epidermis, the dermis, and a fatty layer underneath. The average adult has about 22 square feet of outside skin.

The inside skin starts at the lips and ends at the anus. Its walls are just one cell thick and coated in a protective layer of mucus. You can get a sense of its texture by feeling the slippery quality of the inside of your cheek.

Gut dysbiosis erodes this delicate mucosal layer. Without mucosal protection, the cells start to die, says Greenberg. "As they die, the joints between them open up and you get leaky gut." (For more on leaky gut syndrome, see [ELmag.com/leakygutfaq](http://ELmag.com/leakygutfaq).)

With leaky gut, food particles and bacteria escape the gut and enter the bloodstream. But the bloodstream is not designed to digest food components like proteins, Greenberg notes.

"The whole reason we eat is to break food down into teeny little parts, like amino acids, that can be easily absorbed into the bloodstream, which sends them out to every cell in the body," she says. When the body encounters food particles in the bloodstream that it can't break down, "the immune system is going to be alarmed."

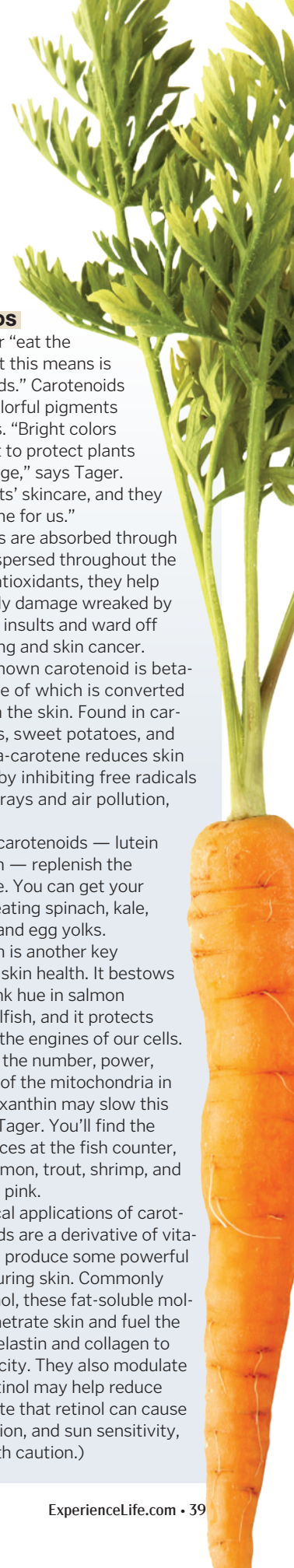
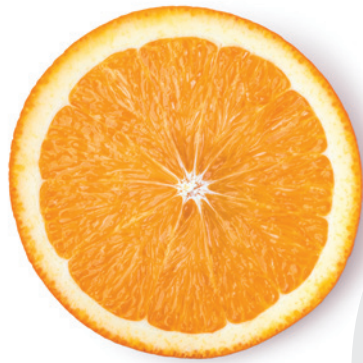
An alarm sounding in the immune system often resounds on the outside skin as inflammation.

One example is rosacea flares, which can be triggered when alcohol inflames the gut. Another is acne, which can be aggravated by sugar and refined carbohydrates. Both enter the bloodstream in a whoosh, like doing a cannonball into a swimming pool, spiking insulin.

This can result in inflammation and an increase in the body's production of sebum, an oily substance that protects the skin. An excess of sebum clogs the pores, leading to blackheads and cysts.

Conversely, a diet of whole, unprocessed foods can give the body nearly everything it needs to maintain healthy skin. In addition to using quality non-toxic skincare products, Tager recommends getting more nutrients into the bloodstream. "You could be delivering nourishment to your skin with every heartbeat — 100,000 times a day."





# The Nutrients

Most experts agree that your skin will thrive if you eat a wide variety of plants and healthy fats. But if you really want to get your glow on, these nutrients can help.

## VITAMIN C

One of the most powerful antioxidants, vitamin C reduces cell damage from external insults like pollution and too much sun. It protects us from factors that age us from the inside, like poor sleep.

It also works topically. "Vitamin C is the topical nutrient we've tracked the longest and know the most about," says Tager. Research shows that vitamin C protects against sun damage, age spots, and even melanoma, the deadliest type of skin cancer.

As the skin ages, a diet high in vitamin C reduces wrinkles by nudging the body to make more collagen and elastin, two proteins that give the skin structure, stretch, and strength. It also helps the skin retain moisture, which can reduce the appearance of fine lines.

Consuming adequate vitamin C even helps heal scratches and cuts, says Julie Garden-Robinson, PhD, RD, a food-and-nutrition specialist at North Dakota State University. Our bodies can't make vitamin C, which is why it's so critical to consume vitamin C-rich foods, such as red peppers, broccoli, kale, and citrus, every day. You can also safely supplement with up to 1,000 mg a day.

There's a lot of hoopla about the benefits of topical vitamin C, but not all products are equal. Look for those with L-ascorbic acid, an active form of the vitamin that your body can put to work immediately. Because vitamin C degrades quickly when exposed to oxygen and light, choose products packaged in dark-tinted bottles with airless dispensers.

## VITAMIN E

Another potent anti-inflammatory, vitamin E works best in the company of vitamin C. Vitamin E molecules lose potency when they destroy free radicals, but nearby vitamin C molecules can restore vitamin E's power.

This duo protects the skin against its No. 1 nemesis: sun damage. A fat-soluble vitamin, vitamin E easily penetrates the skin's deeper layers to heal UV damage. New research suggests vitamin E may even prevent skin cancer by curtailing the sun's harmful impact on DNA.

Boost your vitamin E with nuts and seeds, avocados, red bell peppers, and dark, leafy greens. When applied topically, vitamin E supports healing, protects collagen, and smooths rough skin.



## CAROTENOIDS

When you hear "eat the rainbow," what this means is "eat carotenoids." Carotenoids are the 750 colorful pigments found in plants. "Bright colors evolved in part to protect plants from UV damage," says Tager. "They are plants' skincare, and they can do the same for us."

Carotenoids are absorbed through the gut and dispersed throughout the skin. Like all antioxidants, they help reduce the daily damage wreaked by environmental insults and ward off premature aging and skin cancer.

The best-known carotenoid is beta-carotene, some of which is converted to vitamin A in the skin. Found in carrots, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and mangoes, beta-carotene reduces skin inflammation by inhibiting free radicals caused by UV rays and air pollution, studies show.

Two other carotenoids — lutein and zeaxanthin — replenish the skin's moisture. You can get your daily dose by eating spinach, kale, basil, parsley, and egg yolks.

Astaxanthin is another key carotenoid for skin health. It bestows the reddish-pink hue in salmon and many shellfish, and it protects mitochondria, the engines of our cells. Aging reduces the number, power, and efficiency of the mitochondria in skin cells; astaxanthin may slow this process, says Tager. You'll find the best food sources at the fish counter, specifically salmon, trout, shrimp, and crayfish. Think pink.

As for topical applications of carotenoids, retinoids are a derivative of vitamin A that can produce some powerful effects in maturing skin. Commonly known as retinol, these fat-soluble molecules can penetrate skin and fuel the production of elastin and collagen to increase elasticity. They also modulate melanin, so retinol may help reduce age spots. (Note that retinol can cause dryness, irritation, and sun sensitivity, so proceed with caution.)



**FATTY ACIDS**

The skin requires up to 150 mg of fat daily to stay healthy, in part because fat is a key ingredient in the glue that holds skin cells together. “You don’t want to have leaky skin,” says Tager.

Just as in leaky gut syndrome, loose junctions in the outside skin can lead to transepidermal water loss. This makes the skin drier and less protective, increasing the likelihood of skin damage from friction. Psoriasis, eczema, acne, and dandruff all involve some degree of transepidermal water loss.

Still, the skin doesn’t need just any fat; it needs quality fats, such as the omega-3s found in fish and flaxseeds. “Good fats are your skin’s friend,” says Tager. “They help moisturize from the inside out and strengthen the skin’s ability to act as a barrier.”

An excess of poor-quality hydrogenated oils and certain saturated fats can wreak havoc on your skin. “Throw in some hormonal changes, a high-sugar diet, and a little zinc deficiency, and you have the perfect storm for acne,” he adds.

To feed the skin, Tager recommends a Mediterranean-style diet that emphasizes beneficial fats, such as olive oil. Fatty fish, raw nuts, avocados, and flax oil are good sources of high-quality fats, as are fish-oil supplements. Evidence suggests they can help strengthen the skin’s barrier function, cool inflammation caused by sun damage, slow the formation of age spots, and help relieve dry skin.

**COLLAGEN**

The most abundant protein in the body, collagen is a key component of skin, tendons, and ligaments. As the body ages, it makes less (and lower quality) collagen. This contributes to reduced elasticity and less fresh-looking skin.

Eating meat twice a week provides all the collagen most people need, says Tager. Other foods can help stimulate collagen production too. “To make collagen, we require other cofactors, such as vitamin C, copper, zinc, vitamin A, and silica — all of which can be supplied by a healthy diet.”

Meanwhile, sales of collagen supplements are booming. Collagen peptides, also known as hydrolyzed collagen, are made from the bones, skin, and connective tissue of cows, pigs, and chickens, as well as from fish scales and skin. These proteins break down into amino acids in the digestive tract, which are absorbed into the bloodstream and distributed to the skin.

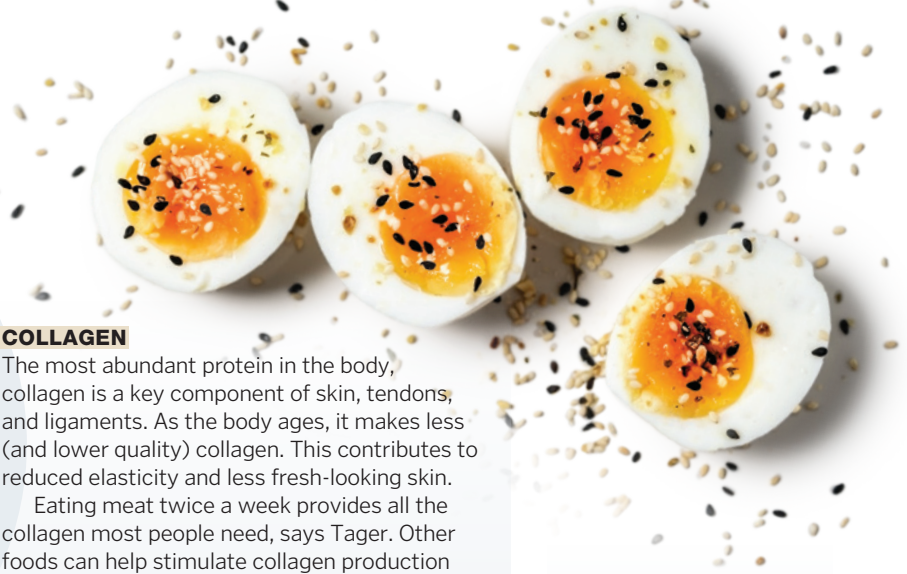
Unlike vitamin C, which dissipates quickly, collagen peptides remain in the skin for up to 14 days. Collagen supports moisture retention by increasing production of hyaluronic acid, which makes skin more pliable. It even fires up the body’s ability to make new skin cells — a capacity that declines with age.

“I admit I was skeptical of the hype around collagen,” says Garden-Robinson. But she was swayed by a raft of studies showing its benefits. Most notably, in 2021, the *International Journal of Dermatology and Venereology* published a meta-analysis of 19 double-blind, randomly controlled trials on the effects of collagen supplementation on skin aging, where the majority of subjects showed improved elasticity and fewer wrinkles.

Worth noting: Collagen products that claim to be animal-free are engaging in a sleight of hand. “Collagen comes from animals,” explains Greenberg. “Vegan collagen products contain high-dose nutrients, such as vitamin C, amino acids, and silica. These are believed to help the body make more of its own collagen.” Some truly vegan collagen products made from yeasts and bacteria are in development, but they’re not available yet.

If you eat a vegetarian or vegan diet, Garden-Robinson suggests getting two servings of protein a day from a variety of sources, including nuts and beans. This gives you “ample protein to nourish your body’s needs and help maintain collagen,” she says.

And if you eat animal products and you want an extra dose of collagen, she suggests drinking a cup of bone broth.



**PROBIOTICS**

What’s good for the microbiome is good for the skin, so aim to include plenty of gut-supportive probiotics in your diet. Solid sources include fermented vegetables, like kimchi and sauerkraut, as well as unsweetened yogurt and kefir. (Dairy can be an acne trigger, so if that’s an issue, seek out yogurt made with coconut or cashew milk.)

“If you give your gut’s good bacteria their favorite food, they will live their best life,” says Tager. “For me, a day without sauerkraut is like a day without the sun.”







### FIBER

Thanks to the close relationship between skin and gut health, fiber may be the skin's greatest ally. Because the body doesn't digest it, fiber ferments in the gut, which helps feed the community of microbiota that reside there.

"You know how pregnant people say they are eating for two?" Greenberg asks. "Well, you are eating for trillions." And a diet high in fiber is the best way to keep the crowds happy.

Studies also show that fermentation of high-fiber foods generates short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs). These include butyrate, propionate, and acetate, all of which help heal the skin from the inside out.

Internally, SCFAs help tighten up loose cell junctions and seal a leaky gut. Externally, they help protect the skin by making it more resistant to bacterial overgrowth. Propionate, for example, has antibacterial properties that can destroy antibiotic-resistant staph.

Greenberg recommends eating at least 35 grams of fiber a day from 30 different plants a week, from artichokes to zucchini. "The point is to build up diversity as well as quantity. More variety will cast a wider net for skin-healthy nutrients."

### SELENIUM

A trace mineral, selenium helps protect keratinocytes, the most dominant skin-cell type. A primary task of keratinocytes is to repair and restore the skin's surface, which may slow the signs of skin aging.

Research suggests that selenium may even help prevent skin cancer. In one notable study of 485 adults in Australia, high levels of selenium were associated with an approximately 60 percent decrease in the incidence of basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas.

Good sources of selenium include Brazil nuts, sardines, broccoli, white cabbage, asparagus, kohlrabi, and mushrooms.



### COENZYME Q10

Popularly known as CoQ10, this micronutrient is vital for mitochondrial function. In the skin, coenzyme Q10 helps fight free radicals triggered by UV radiation and pollution.

Supplements are the easiest way to get a skin-supportive amount of CoQ10, though there are several potent food sources. Organ meats may have the highest concentration, followed by fatty fish, like salmon and mackerel.



### ZINC

Found in all the body's tissues, zinc is essential for cell function. It supports collagen production and modulates inflammation. As a popular topical ingredient in mineral-based sunscreens, zinc oxide reflects and disperses UV rays to protect skin from sunburn.

As a nutrient, it supports wound healing and helps calm inflamed skin. The body can't store zinc, so it's important to consume it daily. Go-to zinc sources include pumpkin seeds, oysters, and red meat.



### NITRIC OXIDE

The body has 60,000 miles of blood vessels. Nitric oxide is a free-radical gas made by the body that supports blood flow. This matters for skin health because between 5 and 10 percent of your blood flows through your skin, explains Tager.

"If the small capillaries feeding the skin are closing off, the skin can't get the nutrients it needs," which can correspond to a gray, ashen complexion. Brighten up by eating more beets, arugula, garlic, and citrus fruits, all of which may increase nitric oxide levels.

Still, when it comes to overall skin health, individual foods are less important than a commitment to dietary diversity, says Garden-Robinson. "Skin is complex. Keeping this vital organ well-nourished requires variety." 🍌

### CATHERINE GUTHRIE

is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.



HOME CHEF

# Clean slates & full, balanced plates

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

## \$140 OFF

HOME CHEF MEALS



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

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





# Spicy Braised Cabbage

BY GRACE KENNEDY

Makes four servings

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes active,  
plus 75 minutes inactive for braising



1 medium red or green  
cabbage (about 2 lb.)



¼ cup extra-virgin  
olive oil, divided



1 yellow onion,  
sliced



½ tsp. sea salt  
(or more to taste)



4 garlic cloves,  
minced



2 tbs. tomato  
paste



1½ tsp. smoked  
paprika



1 tsp.  
cumin



½ tsp. red-pepper flakes  
(or more to taste)



1½ cups chicken  
or vegetable broth

## COOK MORE CRUCIFERS

Cabbage and other cruciferous vegetables are rich in vitamins C and K, as well as other micronutrients. They also offer plenty of gut-friendly insoluble and soluble fiber.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.

Cut the cabbage in half through the core and slice each half into four wedges, doing your best to keep the core intact.

Place a large, oven-safe skillet over medium-high heat and add 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. When the oil is shimmering, add the cabbage wedges, cut side down. Cook about four minutes per side, until browned. Transfer to a plate and wipe out the skillet.

Pour the remaining 2 tablespoons of the oil into the skillet and turn the heat to medium. Add the onion and salt, and cook until the onion is just beginning to brown, about eight minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, another two minutes. Add the tomato paste, paprika, cumin, and red-pepper flakes. Cook until the tomato paste has darkened, about two minutes.

Add the broth, stir to combine, and taste for seasoning. Keep in mind that the flavors will concentrate as the sauce reduces during braising. Add more salt or pepper flakes to taste.

Place the cabbage back in the skillet and bring the sauce to a boil, then cover the skillet and transfer it to the oven. Cook for 60 to 75 minutes, flipping the cabbage once halfway through, until it's extremely tender.

Finish with fresh lemon juice, a dollop of Greek yogurt, or minced fresh dill, if desired, and serve.

GRACE KENNEDY is a Philadelphia-based food writer.



# Fill Your Morning Cup

Start your day off right with our favorite coffee and tea gear.



BY **KAELYN RILEY**

Call it a premonition: One day in March 2020, less than a week before COVID-19 shutdowns began, my husband came home with an espresso machine.

Prior to this acquisition, we'd been a strictly drip-coffee household, and I had something of a toxic relationship with our old 12-cup coffee maker. On days when I worked from home, it was too easy to pour a second cup, or sometimes a third. Occasionally, with a deadline looming, I'd gulp down half a pot by midday — and then spend my afternoon anxiously bouncing from task to task, longing for the sense of focused concentration I'd felt after cup No. 1.

Our espresso machine, on the other hand, encourages a single-serving lifestyle. I've found so much satisfaction in the ritual: Weigh the grounds, pull the shot, steam a few ounces of oat milk. It would truly never occur to me to wish for a second cup. As a result, my mornings generally feel calmer and more intentional — and my nervous system is certainly grateful for it.

What would your morning routine look like if you could bring more care and mindfulness to your beverage setup? Perhaps this list of coffee- and tea-related gear can help you find out. Or consider gifting an item or two to the early bird in your life.



## 1. STORAGE CANISTERS

If you're a coffee lover, you probably already know how important it is to buy quality beans. (For more advice on sourcing good coffee, see [ELmag.com/coffee](http://ELmag.com/coffee).) It's also crucial to store your coffee properly: Because exposure to light or air can diminish the flavor in your beans, it's best to opt for an opaque, airtight storage container (this is also the ideal storage method for loose-leaf tea).

If you really want to step up your freshness game, pick a vacuum-sealed canister, which pumps air out of the container and minimizes the oxidation in coffee beans or tea leaves. Don't store coffee beans in the fridge or freezer: This can introduce moisture and humidity.



## 2. DIGITAL SCALE

A scale is a useful tool for all manner of kitchen tasks. Whatever brewing device you choose, a scale allows you to achieve the perfect ratio of coffee to water — and to do so consistently, day after day, without any eyeballing or guesswork.

## 3. COLD BREWER

All you *really* need to make your own cold-brew coffee is a container and a filter (and, of course, some ground coffee and water), but true devotees might prefer to have a specific tool for the job. The right choice for you depends on your needs: You can get a compact model for easy storage, or a larger system for cold brewing in bulk.



## 4. COFFEE GRINDER

Some coffee experts believe the grinder is the most important piece of equipment involved in brewing your perfect cup.

There are two options

for grinding: A blade grinder, which grinds with a small propeller blade similar to a blender; or a burr grinder, which uses two abrasive surfaces (or burrs) to break down the beans.

While blade grinders are often less expensive, burrs will grind the coffee more uniformly — particularly if you're aiming for a coarser grind, which is preferable for pour-over and French-press preparations.



## 5. STOVETOP ESPRESSO MAKER

As much as I love my espresso machine, most models tend to be pretty expensive. For a more affordable alternative, consider a stovetop version, which you can fill with water and your favorite coffee grounds to make a strong, smooth shot — or several, if you're serving a crowd. An added bonus: These little pots are portable, making them great for travel or even camping.



## 6. ELECTRIC KETTLE

Although a stovetop kettle can heat water to a higher temperature, electric models are more energy efficient — and they boil your water faster, giving you more time to enjoy your coffee or tea break. Most shut off automatically once they reach a boil, and many even retain heat for a while.

True coffee or tea aficionados might consider investing in a variable-temperature electric kettle, which allows you to dial in a specific water temperature. Many teas and coffees brew better at temperatures below boiling, and this tool can help you achieve that precise temperature for your perfect cup.



## 7. POUR-OVER DRIPPER

For a more manual brewing experience, try the pour-over method. It involves slowly pouring hot water over coffee grounds in a basket with a filter, set over a carafe to hold your coffee. (For a step-by-step tutorial, see [ELmag.com/pourover](http://ELmag.com/pourover).)

Pour-over is favored among java enthusiasts because every variable is within your control. The equipment is also easier to clean than, say, a French press (see No. 10).

## 8. TEA INFUSER

If you want to make enough tea for several cups at once, you might like a large pot with an integral infuser. For single-servings, try a tea-infuser basket, which sits inside your mug while it brews a travel-friendly option.

Avoid smaller tools like ball strainers, which don't allow enough space for flavor extraction. (Thirsty for more tea tips? Get some teatime recipes at [ELmag.com/tearecipes](http://ELmag.com/tearecipes).)

## 9. MILK FROTHER

If you like your coffee or tea with a bit of milk (or nondairy milk) — and you don't want to invest in an espresso machine with a steam wand — consider a frother. Many models have pitchers that can fit enough milk for several drinks at once, and some even allow for temperature control.

If you're low on storage space, you could try a handheld stick frother. You can heat the milk on the stove, then use the frother to get that foamy coffee-shop texture — or skip the heat and make cold foam for your favorite iced beverages.

A frother is also useful for blending powders like collagen, matcha, or adaptogens into your drink. (Not sure which adaptogens to add to your beverage? Try our Evening Ashwagandha Latte at [ELmag.com/adaptogenrecipes](http://ELmag.com/adaptogenrecipes).)



## 10. FRENCH PRESS

Compared with an automatic machine, a French press offers more control over water temperature and brewing time with a deceptively easy technique. Just pour hot water over ground coffee, let it steep, and then press. (You can also use a French press to make a pot of tea or even a small batch of cold-brew coffee — give it a try with my recipe at [ELmag.com/coldbrew](http://ELmag.com/coldbrew).)

The metal filter in a French press allows the natural oils from the coffee beans to pass through, which gives your coffee more body and richness than methods that require a paper filter. The downside? They're kind of a pain to clean. (Tip: Unscrew and separate the filter components as you wash for a more thorough clean and a quicker dry.) ☞





# The New Casserole

Flavorful and full of good-for-you ingredients, these plant-forward hot dishes will warm you up as winter sets in — no condensed soup required.

BY **ALYSSA SHULTIS**

I can always count on a casserole to help keep me warm on a cold winter night. Hearty and cozy, these hot dishes are about as hands-off as dinner can get.

While many of us might consider a casserole an inherently indulgent meal — synonymous with heavy, processed ingredients — it turns out that's a self-limiting belief.

That's why I dreamed up some new versions that showcase healthy ingredients: Think leafy greens, winter squash, sweet potatoes, and ancient grains. Each vibrant recipe is full of fresh flavor, without sacrificing any of the comfort or coziness of the classic casserole. Get ready to bring a new set of delicious dishes into your winter dinner repertoire.





## Mushroom Farro Bolognese

Makes six to eight servings

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: one hour

- 1 cup farro
- ½ yellow onion, roughly chopped
- 1 large carrot, roughly chopped
- 2 stalks celery, roughly chopped
- 2 cups stemmed and roughly chopped mushrooms (such as cremini or shiitake)
- 1 cup walnuts
- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp. sea salt
- ⅓ cup tomato paste
- 2 tbs. balsamic vinegar
- 1 14.5-oz. can crushed tomatoes
- 1 cup chopped spinach
- 1 cup ricotta cheese

### PANKO TOPPING

- ½ cup panko
- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves
- 1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- Pinch sea salt

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.

Bring 3 cups of salted water to a boil. Add the farro, reduce heat to low, and cover. Parcook for 15 minutes, then drain.

While the farro is cooking, combine the panko, garlic, thyme, 1 teaspoon olive oil, and pinch of salt in the bowl of a food processor, then blend to combine. Transfer the panko mixture to a separate bowl.

Wipe out the processor bowl and add the onion, carrot, and celery. Process until finely minced. Transfer to a separate bowl, then wipe out the processor bowl and use the processor to mince the mushrooms; wipe the bowl again, then mince the walnuts.

Place a large Dutch oven over medium heat. Add 2 tablespoons olive oil and heat until shimmering, then add the minced vegetables, minced walnuts, and 1 teaspoon sea salt. Sauté for 10 to 12 minutes, until the mixture smells nutty and the vegetables are softened.

Add the tomato paste and stir to coat the walnut and vegetable mixture. Add the balsamic vinegar, crushed tomatoes, and parcooked farro, and stir to combine.

Increase the heat to bring the mixture to a boil. Once it's boiling, turn off the heat. Add the chopped spinach and half the ricotta, and stir to combine. Add the remaining ricotta in dollops on top, then sprinkle with the panko mixture.

Bake, uncovered, for 25 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes, then serve.





## Grain-Free Cauliflower Mac and Cheese

Makes six to eight servings

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 40 minutes

- 1 8-oz. box cassava pasta (or other grain-free pasta)
- 1 head cauliflower, chopped
- 1 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ yellow onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 14.5-oz. can coconut milk
- 1½ tsp. mustard powder
- 1½ tsp. onion powder
- ½ tsp. sea salt
- ½ lb. white cheddar cheese, grated
- ½ lb. feta cheese, crumbled
- 1½ cups chopped Swiss chard or spinach

### ALMOND-CHEDDAR TOPPING

- ½ cup almond flour
- ¼ cup grated white cheddar cheese
- 1 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ tsp. sea salt

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.

Cook the pasta in salted water according to package instructions. Add the cauliflower for the last six minutes. Drain.

Meanwhile, heat a large pan over medium heat. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil and heat until shimmering, then add the onion and cook until translucent. Add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds. Add the coconut milk, mustard powder, onion powder, and ½ teaspoon salt, and stir to combine. Bring to a simmer.

Add ½ pound white cheddar and half of the feta cheese, and stir to combine. Remove sauce from heat.

Place the pasta, cauliflower, and greens in a 9-x-13-inch baking dish, and stir to mix. Pour the cheese sauce over the top and sprinkle with the remaining feta.

Mix the almond flour, ¼ cup white cheddar, 1 tablespoon olive oil, and ¼ teaspoon sea salt in a small bowl. Sprinkle the mixture over the top of the dish and bake, uncovered, for 20 minutes.

Let cool 10 minutes, then serve.

### ENJOY MORE!

Find our recipe for Sweet-Potato Chickpea Curry Casserole at [ELmag.com/casseroles](https://www.ELmag.com/casseroles).







## Quinoa Taco Bake With Guacamole

Makes six to eight servings

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 45 minutes

- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ yellow onion, chopped
- 1 small winter squash, peeled and cubed
- 1 bell pepper, diced
- 1 12-oz. block extra-firm tofu, drained
- 1½ tsp. chili powder
- 1 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. sea salt
- 1 cup dry quinoa, rinsed
- 1 15-oz. can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 2½ cups vegetable broth
- 4 oz. soft goat cheese, crumbled

### GUACAMOLE

- 2 avocados
- ¼ cup minced red onion
- 3 tbs. lemon juice
- Pinch sea salt
- 10 grape tomatoes, halved

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Heat a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the olive oil and heat until shimmering, then add the onion and cook for three to four minutes, until translucent. Add the squash, stir, and cook for another five to seven minutes, until slightly softened. Add the bell pepper and cook for three to four minutes more.

Pat the drained tofu with a kitchen towel to dry the surface, then use your hands to crumble the tofu into the pan. Add the chili powder, paprika, garlic powder, and salt. Stir to combine.

Place the tofu mixture in a 9-x-13-inch baking dish. Add the quinoa, black beans, and vegetable broth, and stir to combine.

Sprinkle with the goat cheese and bake, covered, for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, mash the avocados, red onion, lemon juice, and sea salt together in a large bowl. Stir in the halved grape tomatoes. Let the casserole cool for 10 minutes, then serve with the guacamole. 🍴

**ALYSSA SHULTIS** is a Minneapolis-based writer and editor.





# 5 Skills for Authentic Communication





# How to have deeper conversations.

BY ELIZABETH MILLARD

When Julien Mirivel arrived in the United States in 1994, he was a 15-year-old exchange student from France who didn't speak English. People in his Iowa host town were welcoming and friendly, but he felt isolated by his inability to communicate using anything other than simple gestures. "Even basic conversations came with a feeling of doubt," he recalls.

Mirivel learned a lot during those early years in Iowa, and he's now the author of several books on positive communication. He believes the longing to connect deeply with others isn't limited to learning a new language. "We yearn to have meaningful relationships, but without the ability to recognize the complexity of communication, we can only go so deep."

Many of us struggle to have satisfying conversations. We may feel confused about when to open up or how to ask the kind of questions that help us get to know someone better. We might feel stuck in the shallows of small talk and clueless about how to go deeper. If we're longing for more connection, it can help to view communication itself as a new language — and we can learn to improve our vocabulary with practice.

These skills help build a communication style that can connect us more deeply to loved ones and strangers alike.

## 1. Speak Kindly to Yourself

Most of us know the basics of a good dinner conversation: Address a person by their name, ask open-ended questions, and offer sincere compliments. But if we're struggling to connect more deeply, it's worth considering how our self-talk could be getting in the way.

"Sometimes, it helps to just notice the kinds of thoughts that are firing through your mind," suggests Loretta Graziano Breuning, PhD, author of *Habits of a Happy Brain*. "The brain gets into patterns and habits, and it takes some effort to shift those. The first step is to hear yourself."

If our interior monologue contains more harsh criticism than it does neutral observation, we're likely to monitor ourselves too closely. This can prompt discomfort with connecting; we might avoid making conversation because our critical inner voice

insists that we're not interesting or funny enough.

Breuning suggests writing down some of your inner commentary and noticing how it makes you feel. This helps cultivate more objectivity. Once you've noticed any negative patterns in how you talk to yourself, you can start to replace them.

To begin, try speaking to yourself as you would to a good friend, suggests Judith Hanson Lasater, PhD, PT, coauthor of *What We Say Matters: Practicing Nonviolent Communication*.

"Notice what words or phrases help you feel softer and less stressed," she advises.

Just as negative self-talk can send you into a habit loop, positive encouragement does the same. It primes your brain to relate to yourself — and by extension, to other people — in a new way.





## 2. Greet Others Warmly

Once you've established the habit of noticing and softening the way you talk to yourself, improving your connection with others can start with a friendly hello.

"Greeting one another is found in every culture, and there's a reason for that," says Mirivel. "Greeting is at the heart of how we create relationships."

Think about how you feel when a new doctor walks into the exam room and greets you warmly rather than by launching right into questions about your medical history. "There's a huge difference for how that conversation will flow from there," Mirivel notes.

The same is true in any setting. Imagine your first day at a new job, or attending a party where you know only the host. Then someone makes eye contact, smiles, and says a sincere hello. "It doesn't matter where you are or who you are — that feels like a moment of uplifting engagement," says Mirivel. "It's an opening."

If you're shy about initiating, take small steps. Try greeting the barista before you order your coffee, or say a quick hi to the person you often pass on your evening dog walk. Notice how it shifts the tone of your interactions toward friendliness, and relish how good that feels.

## 3. Cultivate Curiosity

Open-ended questions can deepen conversation. But showing genuine interest in the answer is what really counts, says Celeste Headlee, author of *We Need to Talk: How to Have Conversations That Matter*.

"Asking a good question isn't enough; you need an honest curiosity behind it for a meaningful connection," she asserts. "People will tell you stories that

car ride with a person whose political views were at odds with her own. Rather than avoid politics, she decided to stay curious, ask sincere questions, and find out more.

In the end, she and her fellow passenger still disagreed, but they respected each other's ability to listen. They also discovered that they shared many values about what makes a good



floor you; it's just a matter of finding out about them."

There are other ways that curiosity connects us: When you're really absorbed in someone's story, you don't have to think about body language or tone. You'll most likely lean in, make eye contact, and nod at certain intervals. You're not trying to appear interested — it's just how humans behave when they're deep in conversation.

"This is a *Homo sapiens*' superpower — the ability to read subtle signs from each other and to send out our own," Headlee says. When you want to signal interest, "don't worry about how you're holding yourself or what your hands are doing. Just listen to the other person and soak up what you can."

For tough conversations, notes Lasater, curiosity is even more helpful. She recalls a long

community, even as they had different ideas for how to build it.

"Curiosity helps us find a place that's more neutral," Lasater says. "Our culture is so deeply divided between 'wrong' and 'right.' One practice to find connection is to stop using those words."

She suggests simply letting go of that duality. "It comes from a place of superiority, where we're trying to create a world where we always feel right."

Finally, she adds, try examining your own reactions — especially when you're online. If you find your nervous system fires up as soon as you go on Facebook or the app formerly known as Twitter, consider a break from social media. Then pay attention to whether it becomes easier to maintain your curiosity during in-person conversations.



# 4. Practice, Practice, Practice

When you're learning a new language, full immersion may speed your progress. Still, as Mirivel discovered while learning English in that small Iowa town, practicing with one or two trusted people makes it all less overwhelming. The same is true when learning to deepen your conversations.

"Understanding is easier if you genuinely care about the other person and feel comfortable with them," he says. For example, if you and a close friend practice compassionate communication strategies over a weekly lunch, you can make mistakes and try again more easily than if you were practicing those strategies on social media.

The phone is another good tool for conversation practice, but there are advantages to speaking face-to-face. Eye contact and body language help us track how our words are landing, and chatting in person tends to be more freeform

and wide-ranging, says Mirivel. That allows for more discovery and deeper connection.

Practicing conversation in a nonjudgmental atmosphere is particularly crucial for people who fret about saying the wrong thing, sparking disagreement, or being judged.

It's also helpful for people who have a hard time speaking in a straightforward manner.

Clinical psychologist Kore Glied, PhD, associates this trait with what is known as the type C personality — people who tend toward conflict avoidance and people pleasing.

"For some people, being more direct is really difficult, especially

if they've grown up in an environment where you don't address certain subjects or you were expected to only have pleasant conversation."

Once you start to recognize when you're using agreement to conceal your real feelings, you can begin to shift toward greater honesty. This may start with small gestures.

"Let's say you feel indecisive," says Glied. "Someone asks whether you want pizza or sushi. If your usual reaction is to say you're fine with either, or 'Whatever you want,' just pick one instead. Say what you want."

That may sound incredibly minor, she adds. But these decisions add up to more assurance as you're speaking.

And as you get into the habit of telling the truth, it makes it easier for others to know who you really are.







## 5. Embrace Awkwardness

Remember what it was like when you first learned to ride a bike? Chances are you weren't ready for the Tour de France that same day. The same is true when learning to communicate more deeply: It will feel strange at first.

"The intention with caring communication is to be more authentic," says Mirivel. "For many people, any kind of small change in their habits can feel awkward because it's new. It might come off as mechanical at first, but the important thing is that you're trying. Like anything, you get better with practice."

As you're learning, keep the following strategies in your back pocket — they will help whenever you want to connect more deeply.

- **Ask open-ended questions.**

Most of us tend to ask questions based on what we expect the answer to be, Mirivel says, and we often prep a response before the other person is done talking.

If that's you, try cultivating curiosity with fresh questions: "What was the best moment in your day

today?" or "Why did you choose to start running instead of another sport? What do you like about it?"

- **Begin hard conversations with a soft startup.** When you know ahead of time that a discussion will be challenging or involve conflict, start from a place of warmth, Lasater suggests. It's also wise to ask, "Is now a good time to talk?" That shows respect for your conversation partner from the outset.

- **Reveal a little more.** It can be tough to open up in conversation, especially if you're introverted or private. But sharing and oversharing are not the same thing. A more vulnerable conversation does not have to sound like a therapy session; you get to choose which parts of yourself you want to share.

Start by talking about something that brings you joy, Mirivel suggests. For example, "I tried kayaking for the first time and felt like such a newbie, but it was exhilarating," or "I've really gotten into gardening lately, and now I'm obsessed with monstera plants."

That type of sharing inspires others to offer the same, he says.

- **Offer a sincere compliment.**

A friendly comment can resonate through someone's entire day. Be sincere (people can tell) and be specific. For example, "I appreciated what you said in the meeting about changing the timetable; that was so insightful," or "What a fantastic print on that shirt! Where did you get it?"

**A**fter you've gotten in the habit of being a little more curious and vulnerable, you'll likely find that you don't need to focus on how to have deeper conversations. Instead, you'll probably find yourself enjoying all their benefits: more intimacy and integrity, less loneliness and alienation, and a greater sense of satisfaction and community. All of that is worth speaking up for. 🗨️

---

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



## A SHORTCUT TO CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Nonviolent communication, or NVC, is an approach developed by Marshall Rosenberg, PhD, to help foster connections with others through these steps:

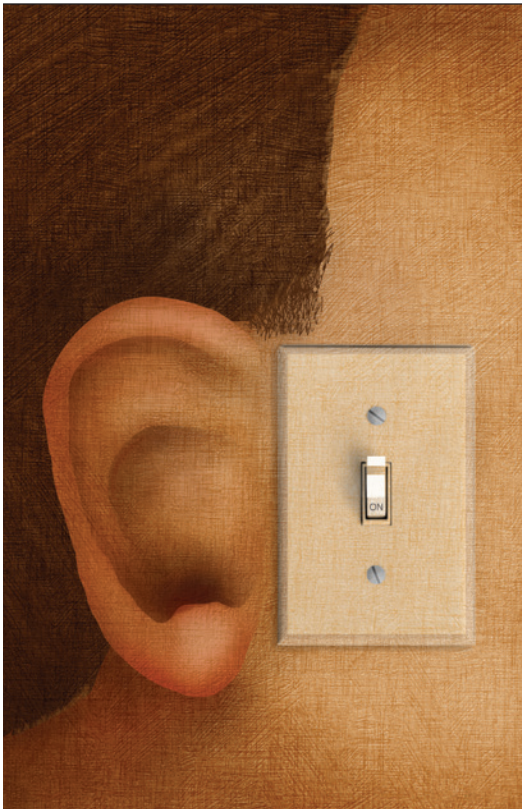
- Observing instead of evaluating
- Stating your feelings
- Expressing your needs
- Making a request

Adopting a basic sentence framework for NVC can be valuable as you're learning the approach, says Judith Hanson Lasater, coauthor of *What We Say Matters*. This is her "training wheels" version:

"When I hear \_\_\_\_\_,  
I feel \_\_\_\_\_,  
because I need \_\_\_\_\_;  
would you be willing to \_\_\_\_\_?"

She offers an example of a sentence one might use after a painful conversation: "When I heard your criticism, I felt hurt, because I need respect; would you be willing to share more about what you meant?"

This is not about avoiding conflict; rather, an NVC approach allows you to engage in it respectfully. "Nonviolent communication doesn't mean you need to agree with everyone or be positive all the time," Lasater says. "It's about listening with a soft heart and establishing that you and others deserve respect and to be heard."



## MINDFUL LISTENING

The other half of compassionate communication is active listening. This involves more than simply being quiet while someone else talks, says Justin Sung, who studies communication, including the science of listening and learning.

"Trying to listen better often isn't effective; it's like trying to read faster," he says. "You have the intention but won't have the same level of comprehension. Active-listening skills help you get more from conversations and approach them with more empathy, and you can also process information more deeply. [This allows you to] respond more meaningfully."

Start by cultivating your ability to pay attention. Spend a few minutes each day sitting quietly with eyes closed, listening to sounds around you. This helps sharpen listening skills and calms your nervous system. The more often you practice mindful listening, the faster you can "tune in" when someone is speaking, Sung says.

"Typically, I see people noticeably transform their ability to understand new information in about three to four weeks of diligent listening practice," he notes. "Most people drastically underestimate themselves when it comes to how quickly they can become better listeners."





# STAND UP FOR YOUR HEALTH

Sitting for long periods might be common, but it's not ideal for health or fitness. **Standing up, however, is a straight-forward way to infuse your day with beneficial movement.**





BY **KELLY STARRETT, DPT,**  
AND **JULIET STARRETT**

**Y**ou've heard it before:  
Sitting, especially for  
long periods of time, is not  
good for you — and a single  
bout of daily exercise does not  
cancel out the time you spend  
in the warm embrace of a chair.

Yet that isn't the whole message.

It's not so much that sitting is bad;  
it's that moving is a whole lot better.

One of the best ways to work  
movement into your life is to stand for  
a greater portion of your day. Standing  
is where the action is because standing  
is a gateway to movement.

In this adaptation from our latest  
book, *Built to Move: The 10 Essential  
Habits to Help You Move Freely and  
Live Fully*, we'll walk you through  
assessing your own sitting habits —  
plus offer ideas on how to stand up for  
your health.

One of the best ways  
to work movement into  
your life is to stand  
for a greater portion  
of your day.

**Standing is where  
the action is.**



## Assess Your Sitting Score

In the last several years, study after damning study has called out the health risks of prolonged sitting. Yet despite broadly worded recommendations to restrict our sedentary behavior, there are still no official guidelines telling us exactly how much sitting is too much.

Given what's practical for most people, we believe aiming to limit your sitting to six hours a day is a reasonable ask. As experts in movement, we think this number squares with how much sitting the body can tolerate before it begins to take a toll on mobility.

How well do you move after hunkering down in a chair for 10 to 12 hours? We wager that you feel stiff and clunky. You don't need a study to tell you that a king-size dose of sitting is detrimental to your body.

Still, sitting is so fundamental to modern life that many people ignore

the damage it does, let alone realize how many hours they spend in the same position day after day. If you're one of these people, now is your chance to find out.

This assessment will take you through a 24-hour period during which you'll note any time you sit in a chair, park yourself on a stool or bench or bed (while sitting, not lying down), or nestle your body into a sofa. We suggest doing the assessment on a typical weekday (weekdays are when most people spend a good share of the day sitting).

Two types of sitting get a pass: sitting or squatting on the floor and exercising while sitting. Cyclists, rowers, kayakers, and other exercisers who work out in a seated position don't need to add that time to their sitting inventory.



**Sitting is so fundamental to modern life that many people ignore the damage it does, let alone realize how many hours they spend in the same position day after day.**

### THE TEST

From the time you get up in the morning to the time you hop into bed in the evening, track the time you spend sitting. This includes sitting at your desk, on your couch, in a car, at a café, while riding public transportation, and more. Again, there are only two exceptions: sitting or squatting on the floor and exercising in a seated position.

Your score is the number of hours you spent sitting during your assessment. Round minutes below 30 down and minutes above 30 up (for example, 7 hours 26 minutes is 7 hours; 7 hours 45 minutes is 8 hours).

If you're surprised by how much you sit, you're not alone. Some of the most well-trained athletes we know get a shock when they calculate their numbers. What's important now is that you're aware of it and can take steps — literal steps! — to avoid prolonged periods of sitting.

### What your results mean:

This is what your score tells you about where you are and where you can strive to be.

**6 hours or less:** We're impressed! Unless you have a job that requires standing (and maybe you do), it's not easy to hit this mark. Keep it up.

**7 to 9 hours:** Depending on where you are in this range, we give you a B+ to a C+. If you're at 9 hours, it may seem like a big leap to get down to 6, but our experience tells us that once you start spending more time out of a chair, change comes fairly easily. You'll begin to want to sit less.

**10 to 12 hours:** You earn a solid C-. You need to reformat your days substantially, but we've seen hundreds of people do it. So can you.

**13+ hours:** We regret to say that you are failing in this one area. The most important thing for you to remember is that you don't have to change overnight. It's not only fine to gradually increase the time you spend on your feet rather than in a chair, but it's also preferable.

### When to retest:

How often should you retest? Daily. Tracking the hours you spend sitting each day can help you build awareness around your habits — and provide a jumping-off point to make changes. You might discover that certain factors keep you seated longer than what is recommended, and you might develop internal alerts to increase the amount of time you spend standing or moving.



## Taking a Stand

While some physical practices we discuss in *Built to Move* aim to get you to move in specific ways to extend your range of motion — such as doing hip-extension and shoulder-rotation mobilizations — the physical practice of standing just aims to help you be less sedentary. If you stand, you're going to end up moving more.

Granted, standing is not moving, strictly speaking, and it can be pretty stationary if you allow it to be. But chances are you won't. In our experience, standing makes you want to move. In fact, for comfort's sake, it requires that you do move.

If you watch someone standing for more than a few minutes — or recall any time you have stood for a long time — you might notice how hard it is to stay still. You might sway your hips, shuffle your feet around, bend your knees, shift your weight, find something to lean on, cross and uncross your arms.

Few people can stand like a sentry for any length of time; the body moves to establish stability and equilibrium. And this small amount of movement, which you might call fidgeting and which some researchers refer to as “spontaneous physical activity,” adds up to quite a bit of energy expenditure over time.

If you care about calories, that is a good incentive to sit less and stand more. But there are other reasons as well.

Researchers in Japan have found that workers who decreased their sitting time had decreased shoulder and neck pain. Other studies have found that using adjustable sit-stand workstations leads to less back pain.

On the flip side, we know that stagnating in a seated position is an invitation to back pain and that back pain makes people move less in their chairs — a vicious cycle if ever there was one.

When you sit for long periods and feel pain, it's not hard to connect the two. But there are also plenty of unhealthy conditions caused by prolonged sitting that you might not →

# TAKE A MOBILIZATION BREAK!

You can do these two mobility exercises at or next to your desk to balance out the effects of sitting.



## ELEVATED PIGEON

- While sitting in a chair, keeping one foot flat on the floor, bend your other leg and place your ankle on top of your bent knee so that your legs form a “4” shape.
- Place your hands on your bent leg, lean forward slightly, and rotate toward your left side, then toward your right side.
- Continue alternating between the two positions, rotating left and right, for two minutes or as long as possible.
- Repeat on the opposite side.



## KNEELING ISOMETRIC

- Kneel on the floor with your right leg at a 90-degree angle and your left knee on the floor behind you. Maintain an upright torso and place your hands on your right knee.
- Squeeze the right side of your butt and move your right knee forward as far as you can — it won't go far with your butt squeezed — and hold the position.
- Keep your butt engaged as you breathe — five slow inhales, five slow exhales — for one minute. Make sure you keep the working side of your butt engaged for the entire minute.
- Repeat on the opposite side.



even know are developing until it's too late: impaired vascular function, high blood pressure, poor blood-sugar metabolism, inflammation, reduced blood flow to the brain, and even a blunting of the beneficial effects of exercise, such as lowering triglycerides and insulin levels.

One reason this happens is that when you're seated in a chair, your leg musculature becomes passive and consequently doesn't require much energy. In response, many things, including blood flow and blood-sugar metabolism, slow down.

If, on the other hand, you're standing, your legs are loaded — they have to work to support your upper-body weight. This taxes the system for the better.

There's a particular gain for exercisers as well. Too often, people who work out in the morning or during lunch go right from redlining their internal engines to just sitting.

We know that is not the best way to facilitate maximal adaptation to exercise, nor does it give the heart rate and body temperature time to slowly return to normal.

Also, encased in a chair or a car's seat, you're not promoting circulation, which can cause your muscles and connective tissues to stiffen up.

What do you think the difference will be between going for a run after standing at a desk for three hours and going for a run after sitting for three hours? You'll have a different experience.

You can test this. Sit for an hour and go sprint; then stand and fidget for an hour and go sprint. Your poststanding time is going to best your postsitting time.

## The Change “Up”

Although we hope you'll shoot for the moon — sitting only six or fewer hours a day — our ultimate goal is

to have you spend less time sitting in the same position. There are lots of ways to do that, whether it be by using a standing desk or toggling back and forth between a standing and a sitting desk; taking frequent breaks from your regular sitting desk; doing some of your working or viewing at a kitchen counter; or making a personal policy of not sitting on public transportation or in waiting rooms.

You can do any or all of the above, changing your strategies as the day allows. You can even stay seated and employ some movement tactics there.

What follows are the physical practices that can help you reach your goals to move more.

Moving often is imperative, whether you're sitting or not.

# WORKING WHILE STANDING

Consider these tips when you're setting up a standing workstation, starting from the bottom up.

## GET CUSHIONED.

Standing static on a hard surface is a fast track to discomfort. Wear a cushioned shoe or add cushioning with a rug, exercise mat, or antifatigue mat created especially for people who stand for long periods of time.

## ADJUST DESK HEIGHT.

Many fixed-height standing desks are 40 to 42 inches tall, and there are adjustable solutions that sit on top to give you more leeway in terms of surface height. To find the right height, use this rule of thumb: Standing at your desk, bend your elbows so your forearms are parallel to the floor. The desk should be at elbow height plus one

inch. We say should, not must, because you've got to see how it feels. If it doesn't feel good, that's a sign to adjust up or down.

## ASSUME THE IDEAL STANDING POSITION.

The point of using a standing desk is to move more, so you're going to automatically assume many different positions during your standing sessions. But during those times you're standing straight, the best position is this: Stand comfortably with your feet straight and underneath your hips, with 50 percent of your weight on the balls of your feet and 50 percent of your weight on the heels.

## SUPPORT YOUR STANCE.

If you have the right accessories next to you, your body will naturally figure out how to use them to lighten its load and stay in equilibrium. Placing a barstool — preferably one with a flat seat and squared edges that's about the height of your inseam — behind you gives you a surface to occasionally perch on, lean back against, or rest your foot on.

The other workstation essential we recommend is a foot support that, by allowing you to prop up one foot, can make it easier to stand comfortably.

## TRAIN TO STAND.

We really mean it: You need to train for using a standing workstation like you'd train for a marathon. Just as you wouldn't go from spending your waking days on the couch to running 26.2 miles, you shouldn't go from years of sitting to standing eight hours a day. If you do, it's going to be painful.

Take it slow. Start out with a half hour a day and increase at a pace that feels right.

And remember: You don't need to stand perfectly still. If you're itching to move, then move! Sway your hips. March in place. Do some stretches. Let your body be your guide.



# DYNAMIC SITTING

We understand that some people won't or can't use a standing workstation. But moving more while seated is possible. Whether you sit all the time or rotate between sitting and standing, these are three ways to keep moving.

1.

## BREATHE

This isn't so much about moving as it is about avoiding the tendency to curl up like a shrimp while sitting at a desk, straining your neck, shoulders, back, and on down the line. When seated, get into a shape that allows you to take a deep breath. If you can't breathe deeply into your belly, it's a sign that you're not in a movement-friendly position. Once you're where you can breathe fully, then you can think about starting to move more.

2.

## GEAR UP

We recommend two things to help you move more while sitting. One is a fidget bar. There are several of these footrest devices on the market that provide a little resistance as you swing them or push against them. (You can use them with standing desks too.)

The other item we recommend is a chair that allows for greater movement of the torso. The "active seating" category includes chairs, stools, and balls. We don't have a favorite, just an overall rule of thumb: Your desk chair should not resemble a cozy little alcove for you to slump into.

3.

## RISE UP

Baseball has the seventh-inning stretch; you can have the half-hour stretch. Do whatever it takes to remind yourself to get out of your chair every 30 minutes. Set an electronic alert on your computer or an alarm on your watch — and obey it! Get up for a minute or more and move. If you can't stand up, use that alert to just move more within the confines of your chair.



Creating an environment that keeps you moving is a way to limit or even eliminate the option of too often just sitting. By design, we're meant to be in motion all day, not necessarily in grand gestures like an hour in the pool or on a running path, but by frequently changing positions, adjusting the body's load, fidgeting. There's always been derisiveness directed at people who "can't sit still," but we'd argue that those people have the right idea. Moving often is imperative, whether you're sitting or not. 🚶

**KELLY STARRETT, DPT**, is a physical therapist and the coauthor of *Built to Move*, *Becoming a Supple Leopard*, *Ready to Run*, and *Deskbound*. He is also the cofounder of The Ready State, which offers daily guided mobility training and other resources to help athletes stay pain-free. **JULIET STARRETT** is the coauthor of *Built to Move* and *Deskbound*, and cofounder and CEO of The Ready State.



From *BUILT TO MOVE: The 10 Essential Habits to Help You Move Freely and Live Fully* by Kelly Starrett and Juliet Starrett. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of The Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

Copyright © 2023 by Kelly Starrett and Juliet Starrett.



# A Surprising Metabolic Marker

The latest  
research on  
**uric acid**  
suggests that this waste  
product may be an  
important bellwether for  
cardiometabolic  
health.





BY MO PERRY

**B**efore she passed away in a memory-care unit at age 93, my friend George's mother had been suffering for years from a combination of gout, diabetes, high blood pressure, and dementia. On the surface, these conditions may not seem related, but a growing body of evidence suggests they may share a common underlying mechanism: high levels of uric acid.

"Globally, we're being devastated by chronic degenerative conditions: type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease, various forms of cancer, and Alzheimer's. These are metabolic issues — problems with how our bodies use fuel to create energy," says David Perlmutter, MD, neurologist and author of *Drop Acid: The Surprising New Science of Uric Acid*.

Traditionally, metabolic health markers have included fasting blood sugar, insulin levels, blood lipids, body mass index, and blood pressure. But some physicians are now paying close attention to uric acid as well.

"We've known for a long time that there's a correlation between high uric acid and obesity, hypertension, and diabetes. Now we know that it's not just an innocent bystander but is playing a central role in causing them," says Perlmutter.

### UNDERSTANDING URIC ACID

One of the body's waste products, uric acid is generated when the body metabolizes purines. These organic compounds are abundant in an array of food and drink, with the highest concentration found in red meat, beer and spirits, and in certain seafoods. Our bodies also create their own purines (and subsequently uric acid) when we metabolize fructose and alcohol.

Because our bodies can't break down uric acid, we need to excrete it. "We have two ways to get rid of

it. About a third of it goes through the gut, and the other two-thirds go through the kidneys," explains University of Colorado professor of medicine Richard Johnson, MD, author of *Nature Wants Us to Be Fat*.

When uric-acid levels are under control, this process works nicely. But when they rise past a certain threshold, excess uric acid can overwhelm our ability to excrete it, forming crystals in the kidneys that can develop into kidney stones. These crystals can also accumulate in joints, leading to the painful swelling and inflammation known as gout.

"Traditionally, we've looked at uric acid in the context of only two things: kidney stones and gout," Perlmutter says. "To this day, that's how it's being taught in medical schools."

New research suggests the risks of excess uric acid don't end there. "Now there's data showing that maybe 80 percent of people with gout also have crystals in their aorta or in their coronary arteries," says Johnson.

That means these crystals also have the potential to damage the heart. "In the last few decades, uric acid has been linked with heart attacks, heart disease, and systemic inflammation," he adds.

While many doctors still check uric-acid levels only in patients with gout, that's changing. Cardiologist Mimi Guarneri, MD, founder and president of the Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine in La Jolla, Calif., routinely checks her patients' levels. "The reason I test it is because of the links with cardiovascular disease," she explains.

Gout and kidney stones become more likely when uric-acid levels exceed 7 milligrams/deciliter, which is why the standard "normal" lab value range tops out around 7.2 mg/dL. But some physicians suspect cardiovascular risks occur at lower levels, even in the absence of other symptoms.

"Uric acid's effects on the heart are sort of hidden," Guarneri notes. "It can act as a potent oxidant, causing oxidative stress and damaging the lining of the blood vessels."

Ideally, levels should be below 5.5 mg/dL, says Perlmutter. "The literature is clear that cardiometabolic risk begins at that level in men, women, and children, so our target goal is 5.5 mg/dL or less."

“

In the last few decades, uric acid has been linked with heart attacks, heart disease, and systemic inflammation.”

### THE SURVIVAL SWITCH

Why would our bodies generate a potentially harmful compound? The answer lies in the differences between our modern environment and the one in which our ancestors evolved millions of years ago. It turns out that uric acid isn't merely a waste product; in certain circumstances, it can help keep us alive.

"Uric acid is a central player in regulating our metabolism. It's an alarm system telling our bodies to prepare for times of food scarcity," Perlmutter explains.

Around 14 million years ago, the earth's temperature dropped sharply, initiating an ice age. "The cooling eventually became a powerful environmental pressure, favoring survival among those who were able to sustain significant periods of caloric scarcity," he writes in *Drop Acid*.

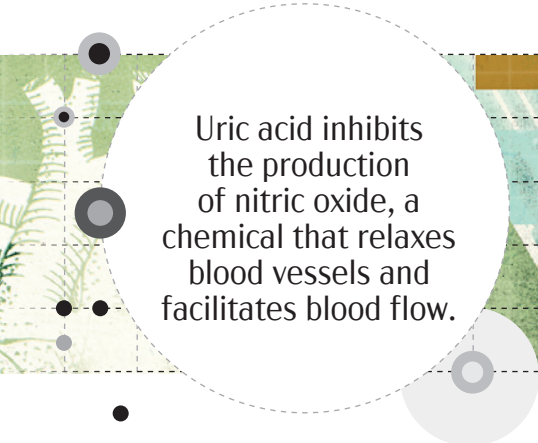
Among the adaptations our ancestors developed was a deactivation of



the gene that codes for uricase, a liver enzyme that breaks down uric acid. Without that enzyme, uric acid can accumulate in our system.

Why would this be adaptive? Uric acid causes oxidative stress inside the body's cells, suppressing mitochondria's ability to produce energy. "When you drop the cells' active energy, it's like the low fuel warning on the dashboard. It stimulates hunger," Johnson explains.

Not only does that process encourage additional calorie consumption,



Uric acid inhibits the production of nitric oxide, a chemical that relaxes blood vessels and facilitates blood flow.

but it also reduces fat burning, increases fat storage, and raises blood pressure and blood sugar.

These effects are useful when facing starvation. Consuming more energy and storing it away can get a person through lean times: When blood sugar runs high over an extended period, insulin becomes less effective at moving glucose into muscle and liver cells — what's known as insulin resistance. In the short term, this helps ensure that all that glucose remains available to fuel the brain as it searches for more food to pad the stores.

We can witness this energy-conserving process in nature. "Animals in the wild that ingest large amounts of fructose present in honey and fruit activate a series of survival responses that include foraging for food, lowering their metabolism, becoming insulin resistant, and increasing fat storage," explains Johnson.

This strategy is used by hibernating animals as well as by birds preparing for long-distance travel; it helps them survive periods of food shortage. "Our studies suggest that uric acid produced from the metabolism of fructose activates this whole process."

The difference between modern humans and our Ice Age ancestors, as well as between modern humans and wild animals, is that we don't have hibernation, long migrations, or long periods of food scarcity to help us use up all that stored energy. Yet when there's insulin resistance, the "survival switch" mechanism stays on. This sets off a domino effect, known in humans as metabolic syndrome.

### **METABOLIC SYNDROME AND THE BRAIN**

Insulin resistance, high blood sugar, and high blood pressure aren't only dangerous for the heart; they've also been linked to a higher risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. "Everything bad for the heart is also bad for the brain because it affects the blood vessels," notes Guarneri.

A study that followed 1,598 seniors for a decade discovered that those with the highest baseline levels of uric acid were 1.8 times more likely to develop dementia than those with the lowest levels. Another study, of 228 elderly people in Japan, published in 2016, found that subjects with the highest levels of uric acid were more than four times as likely to be cognitively impaired than those with lower numbers (specifically, levels below 5.5 mg/dL for men and 4.2 mg/dL for women).

While these studies don't prove uric acid causes cognitive decline, there are a couple of possible mechanisms for how elevated uric acid might hurt the brain. First, while insulin resistance can boost the brain in the short run by giving it more glucose, long-term insulin resistance compromises the brain's ability to function.

Second, uric acid inhibits the production of nitric oxide, a chemical that relaxes blood vessels and

facilitates blood flow. "We certainly don't want to compromise blood flow to the brain, which is what happens when nitric oxide is unavailable," Perlmutter notes.

### **THE TROUBLE WITH FRUCTOSE**

Modest amounts of fructose are found in fruit, honey, and vegetables such as broccoli, asparagus, artichokes, and okra. Still, whole foods are not where most Americans are getting the bulk of their fructose.

Some estimates suggest that in the early 20th century, the average American ate around 15 grams of fructose a day — roughly an orange plus a cup of blueberries. Today, we consume an average of more than 55 grams. Most of that comes from soft drinks, desserts, sauces, condiments, and processed foods. Fructose, along with glucose, is also found in table sugar.

This trend is leading to unexpected health problems in certain populations.

Gout was once known as the disease of kings, because only the wealthy could afford to consume great quantities of purine-rich red meat, organ meats, shellfish, sardines, anchovies, and beer and spirits. Yet "shellfish and beer" doesn't exactly describe the diet of American teens, many of whom are now showing elevated uric-acid levels.

A small study of adolescents diagnosed with hypertension found a strong correlation between uric-acid levels over 5.5 mg/dL and high blood pressure. The randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial found that taking measures to reduce uric acid successfully lowered the teens' blood pressure, demonstrating that uric acid may have been initiating their hypertension.

"Why would uric acid be high in a 14-year-old?" Johnson asks. "These were teens who were drinking a lot of soda. We realized that sugar could do it." Specifically, high-fructose corn syrup, the most common sweetener for conventional sodas and snacks.

"Fructose is substantially sweeter than glucose, and making high-



fructose corn syrup is very, very cheap,” Perlmutter notes.

Our uric-acid levels have risen in tandem with our fructose consumption. “The average American had a uric-acid level of 3.5 mg/dL in the 1920s, and today it’s north of 6,” Perlmutter says. “High-purine foods aren’t the biggest culprits. It’s the fructose.”

Alcohol is another trigger, Johnson says. It lowers adenosine triphosphate, a key source of cellular energy. “It does it both independently and by stimulating fructose production.”

While glucose from refined carbohydrates doesn’t lead directly to uric-acid production, it can transform into fructose in the body.

And animal studies suggest that excess salt may also trigger the body to convert glucose into fructose.

### URIC ACID: CHICKEN OR EGG?

If elevated uric acid is associated with a range of metabolic problems, lowering uric acid should help reverse them, right? The frustrating answer so far is that we don’t know.

Uric acid may trigger metabolic syndrome, Johnson explains, but then other processes take over and perpetuate it. “We see small, partial effects of lowering uric acid on obesity, insulin resistance, fatty liver, and high blood pressure,” he says. “We discovered that what initiates something and what continues to drive it can be different.”

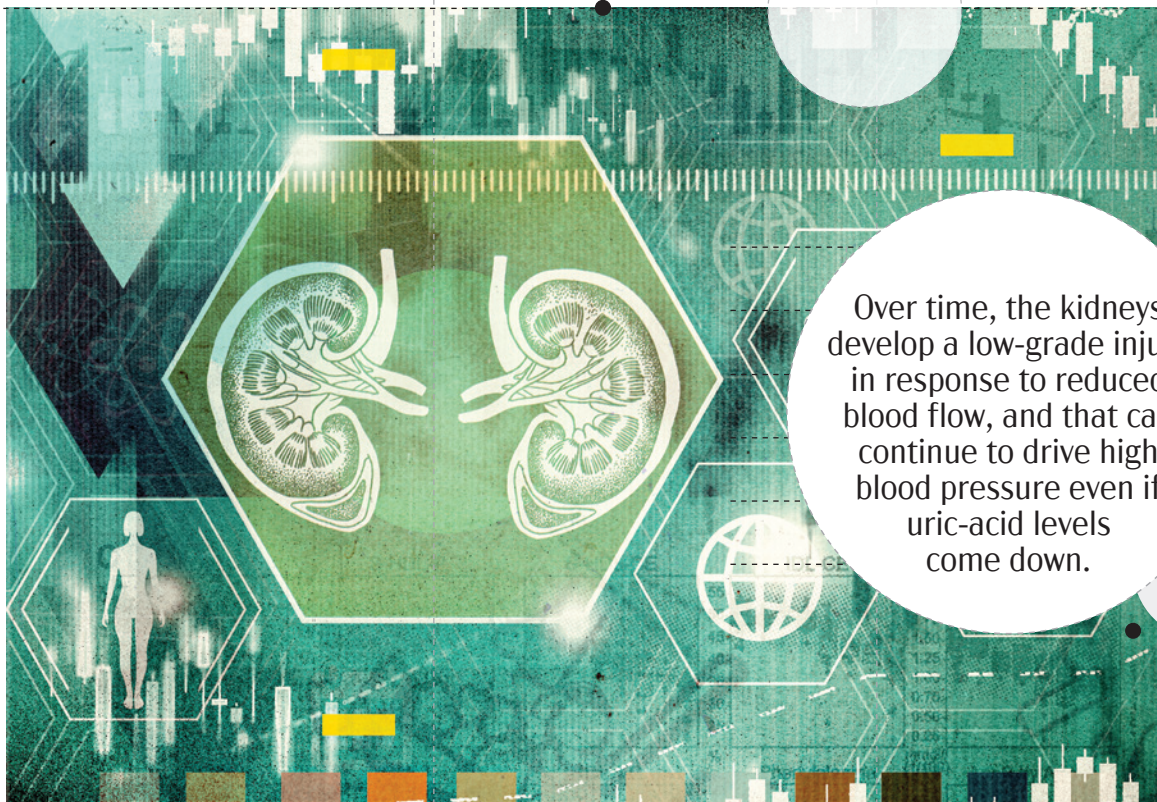
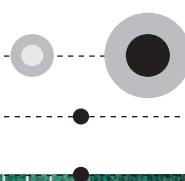
For instance, uric acid can raise blood pressure by constricting blood vessels. Over time, the kidneys develop a low-grade injury in response to reduced blood flow, and that can continue to drive high blood

pressure even if uric-acid levels come down.

Likewise, uric acid can harm mitochondria, the cellular power plants that generate energy. When that goes on long enough, the mitochondria can start to deteriorate.

At that point, lowering uric acid may not have much of an effect on symptoms of metabolic syndrome.

“There’s strong clinical evidence that high uric acid increases your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and kidney disease. What’s not proven is whether lowering uric acid reduces the risk,” Johnson says. “But I’m pretty convinced that if you can lower uric acid *before* you get metabolic syndrome, there’s going to be benefits.”



Over time, the kidneys develop a low-grade injury in response to reduced blood flow, and that can continue to drive high blood pressure even if uric-acid levels come down.





## HOW TO LOWER URIC ACID

If you're concerned about your uric-acid level, the first step is to measure it, Perlmutter says. You can ask your physician to order a uric-acid test as part of routine labs at your annual physical, or use a home testing kit. (Several brands are available online. Typical cost is about \$80.)

If you discover you're above 5.5 mg/dL, Perlmutter recommends testing once a week while you implement a program of dietary and lifestyle changes, then once every two weeks thereafter until reaching levels of 5.5 mg/dL or below.

Aim to test first thing in the morning, before meals or exercise. Levels tend to fluctuate in response to food, alcohol, purines, heat stress, and intense exercise.

The following are some other steps you can take.

### ● Address Diet

Dietary changes to lower uric acid are pretty straightforward.

"The top three things to reduce your uric-acid level are [to] reduce your fructose consumption, reduce your fructose consumption, and reduce your fructose consumption," Perlmutter says. "That's the biggest issue, far and away."

You may also want to reduce your salt consumption if you eat a lot of starchy, high-glycemic foods, such as rice, bread, and potatoes, because salt may activate pathways that convert glucose into fructose.

Increasing hydration can also help, because dehydration concentrates the blood and can lead to elevated uric acid.

Guarneri recommends limiting high-purine foods and alcohol, and drinking tart cherry juice, which research finds can lower serum levels of uric acid.

### ● Try Supplements

In scientific studies, several supplements have shown promise for reducing high levels:

**Quercetin**, a compound found in onions, apples, and capers, inhibits the actions of an enzyme called xanthine oxidase, which is crucial in generating uric acid. A study published in 2016 found that adults taking 500 mg of quercetin per day significantly lowered their levels of uric acid. (For more on quercetin, visit [ELmag.com/quercetin](http://ELmag.com/quercetin).)

**Luteolin**, a flavonoid found in many vegetables and fruits, may have uric-acid-lowering abilities comparable with those of the most commonly used medication to treat gout. Perlmutter recommends 100 mg per day.

**Vitamin C** has been shown in multiple studies to lower uric acid and protect against gout. A meta-analysis at Johns Hopkins University concluded that vitamin C supplementation significantly lowers serum levels of uric acid. Johnson recommends 500 mg twice daily.





The top three things to reduce your uric-acid level are [to] reduce your fructose consumption, reduce your fructose consumption, and reduce your fructose consumption.”

### ● Right-Size Exercise

Both too little and too much exercise can increase uric-acid production.

When we push too hard, too often, without taking time for recovery, the breakdown of muscle tissues increases the supply of purines for the body to metabolize, leading to spikes in uric acid.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by researchers in South Korea found that subjects who were sedentary for more than 10 hours a day were more likely to have high uric acid than those who were inactive for fewer than five hours per day. The researchers calculated that low- and moderate-intensity physical activity reduced the subjects' risk of elevated uric-acid levels by 12 percent, and a routine including some vigorous physical activity reduced the risk by 29 percent.

Perlmutter prefers to err on the side of vigorous exercise. “Strength training is best for your metabolism and improving insulin sensitivity. Uric acid might tick up a bit after breaking down muscle cells, but the net effect long-term is beneficial,” he says.

Just be sure to build in time for recovery between workouts.

### ● Experiment With Intermittent Fasting

Research suggests that limiting food intake to an eight-to-12-hour window can improve insulin sensitivity, blood pressure, fat metabolism, gut function, and immune function. It can also lower inflammation and help regulate uric acid.

Note that some medications, like diuretics, proton pump inhibitors, beta-blockers, and blood pressure medicines, are associated with elevated uric acid. Work with your healthcare provider to test and address your level to ensure you're taking a holistic view of possible contributing factors.

As with any measure of health, no single marker can tell you everything. But as the new kid on the block when it comes to cardiometabolic health, uric acid may provide another important metric for keeping the body in balance before disease sets in. It may not be mainstream yet, Johnson notes, but he expects it will be.

“I think there will be a time when people realize that treating uric acid early has a chance to really show benefit.” ●

## Fruit vs. Fructose

Lowering your overall fructose intake does not mean ditching all fruit. “The small amount of fructose you eat with natural fruit is actually good,” says clinician and researcher Richard Johnson, MD, who has conducted multiple clinical trials on fructose metabolism.

Whole fruits contain nutrients — such as vitamin C, flavonoids, potassium, and fiber — that tend to block the harmful effects of fructose. Most fruit juices, though, lack many of these beneficial substances and concentrate fructose at much higher levels. Likewise, dried fruit is higher in fructose than its fresh counterparts.

Johnson suggests sticking to modest portions of fresh, whole fruit, and consuming 8 grams or less of fructose at a time; this is a little more than you'd find in a cup or two of berries or in a single orange or banana.

**MO PERRY** is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.





**CHOOSE BETTER.  
MOVE BETTER.**

NY  
—  
NJ  
—  
CT  
—  
FL

# **MOVE YOUR BEST WITH THE WORLD'S #1 IN ORTHOPEDICS**

With a dedicated team of specialists 100% committed to helping you move better, HSS gives you access to expertise no other healthcare provider can offer. Which means you can get back to doing what you love sooner.



Scan to learn more.  
Most major insurance  
plans accepted.



# Real Life



Page  
78

“I don’t know if people understand how meaningful it is to see the Atlantic Ocean from the other side, to recognize there’s someone within my lineage who never got a chance to look from this perspective again.”

— Andrea Hanson

**Explore how traveling the ancient lands of your ancestors can bring a new understanding of who you are and where you come from.**



# Understanding Overstimulation

It's not uncommon to be overwhelmed by all of the stimuli in your environment. These strategies can help you recognize and deal with this feeling.

BY JESSIE SHOLL

Last month, my friend Sarah and I walked into a Mexican restaurant together after our weekly Zumba class. Without speaking, we gravitated toward a two-top at the outer edge of the dining room. The week before, at the same restaurant, I'd asked the host if we could change locations twice because the first two options were near loud, crowded tables.

It's almost impossible for me to have a conversation with someone if there's someone else speaking behind me. Thankfully, Sarah knows this about me and understands — she deals with her own sensory triggers, as do many people.

“Another way to describe overstimulation is mental overload,” says Laurie Helgoe, PhD, author of *Introvert Power: Why Your Inner Life Is Your Hidden Strength*. “It's when the external inputs outweigh our capacity to process.”

Helgoe, cohost of the podcast *The Incompatibles*, knows it's happening to her when she feels a bit frantic and stressed. “It's similar to having a bunch of windows open on your computer; the system can get overwhelmed and just shut down,” she explains.

Some people are more susceptible to overstimulation, including introverts, highly sensitive people (HSP), and those with autism or anxiety disorders. But it can happen to anyone, and the unavoidable profusion of stimuli — computer screens, 24-hour news, and endless push notifications — doesn't help matters.

Our environments comprise countless sensory triggers that stimulate one or more of our five senses. For those prone to overstimulation, a catalyst such as bright or flickering lights, temperature changes, a new fabric, or even a hug could lead to stress, irritability, or other negative reactions. Thankfully, there are strategies we can use to cope with sensory overload.





## Know Your Triggers

Not everyone has the same triggers or reactions — so one of the most important steps in handling overstimulation is to notice the sources, explains psychologist Michael Alcée, PhD, mental health educator at the Manhattan School of Music. “Ask yourself, *Did I have too many meetings in a row? Have I had any solo time today? Have I been under bright lights for too long?*”

At his office, Alcée doesn’t use overhead fluorescent lights because they can feel overwhelming and overstimulating to HSPs like himself and some of his clients. “Other people could be more sensitive to noises or textures,” he explains.

Once you notice what’s overwhelming you, you can work toward solutions by considering what’s within your control. For example, Alcée once advised a client with light sensitivity to wear a baseball hat to class, which helped immensely. Small things can make a big difference.

## Make Space for Yourself

Conversations with others can be a common source of mental overload. Helgoe explains that introverts are already stimulated by their thought processes, so they don’t need much from the external world.

“We like to process things internally,” she adds. “I say that I’m ‘taking information into my laboratory.’ Introverts prefer to process privately and then reveal our outputs to the world.”

This can sometimes mean that an introverted person will still be processing what’s been said while the other person continues to speak, adding new information and more stimulation. Explaining what’s happening, or “narrating your quiet,” is a strategy Helgoe employs to make space for herself in situations like this. You can say something like “I need a second because I’m still processing” or “Let me think that over for a moment.”

## Protect Your Time

An overflowing inbox can make anyone feel overwhelmed, especially if some of those messages include

requests for your time. “I will often say to people, ‘Let me think about this, and if I don’t get back to you by tomorrow, please ping me,’” Helgoe says.

It might also help to downgrade an incoming phone call to written communication, which can feel less stimulating and allow you to take your time with the information.

“If I get a phone call and I just don’t have the bandwidth, I might send that person a text or email instead and ask them what’s up,” Helgoe explains. That way, she can assess the urgency of the conversation before she responds.

Setting aside transitional time in your schedule should be a priority. “I don’t ever schedule meetings back-to-back if I can help it, and I will block that in-between time on my calendar,” she explains. “Claiming space for that can be a huge stress reducer.”



## Design an Exit Strategy

Planning a way out of a situation is important for people who tend to get overstimulated in groups, even if the escape is just a brief one. “Sometimes we need to temporarily shut down the system when we’re overstimulated,” Alcée says. “It’s a way of taking back your inner space.”

If you’re in a comfortable setting with folks who understand your sensory triggers, like I was when my friend Sarah agreed to switch tables at the restaurant, you could give your people a heads-up that you might need a few moments to yourself.

In other social situations where you feel you might need a break, try to have an escape plan in mind. It might be as easy as ducking into the bathroom for a few minutes. Or maybe you need a built-in excuse to take a longer break — or remove yourself from a situation entirely.

“When my son was a baby and we’d go to a restaurant, I’d volunteer to walk him around,” Alcée says, “because he would get tired of sitting, and so I would take that as my opportunity to step away.”

## Shift Your Perspective

When you find yourself feeling overloaded, calming your nervous system can help you relax and refocus. Breathing exercises can help you unwind even in a highly stimulating environment. (Learn about belly breathing and the 4-7-8 breath at [ELmag.com/breathingexercises](http://ELmag.com/breathingexercises).)

Helgoe suggests meditation, which can help you slow your thoughts and tune in to your body. She goes for walks, finding it helpful to look up at the sky and observe her surroundings. “That way, I feel more space to air out my thoughts,” she explains.

If she needs a bigger reset, she goes to the movies. She calls it “movie therapy” and adds that she often feels like she comes out of the theater “with fresh eyes toward my own life. It’s one of my favorite perspective-taking activities.”

Alcée suggests another type of reframing: Rather than thinking of overstimulation as something you need to hack or as a problem you need to solve, imagine it’s a message your body is sending you.

“It’s not a personal failing, by any stretch,” he notes. “It’s simply a signal that something in your environment is out of balance.” Changing the way you think about that signal can be a powerful reminder of your body’s inner wisdom. 🧠

---

**JESSIE SHOLL** is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

LSKD

1% *BETTER*  
*EVERY* Day

LSKD.COM



# Make Room for Fun

It's time to overcome the "shoulds" and live a more joyful life.

BY HENRY EMMONS, MD, AND AIMEE PRASEK, PhD



When you hear the word “fun,” do you immediately feel a sense of longing?

Many of us view fun as irresponsible, or acceptable only in the extreme; that’s our work-hard, play-hard mentality.

But we all know how to have fun: It’s as natural as breathing. In fact, most things we do can be fun so long as our thinking doesn’t get in the way. Especially our thinking about what we should be doing instead — as in *I should do that. I should be this.*

Few things throw cold water on a good time like a weighty sense of obligation. But we can create a balance of duty and reliability right alongside fun and pleasure. And the benefits of doing so go well beyond a good time.

## Fun Can Turn Back the Clock

Ellen Langer’s well-known “counterclockwise” study provides insight on how we can shift our mindset to bring more fun back into our lives. And fun can even help us feel younger.

In 1981, Langer and her Harvard research team took a group of eight participants in their 70s to stay for five days in a monastery that channeled the year

1959: The decor, newspapers, magazines, and music on the radio carried the participants back to that year. Mirrors were replaced with photos of the participants from 20 years earlier.

Before these participants stepped into this time capsule, researchers assessed their dexterity, hearing, vision, cognition, and other aging markers. Then the participants were encouraged to act and think as they once did, even to speak in the present tense about their experiences regarding the movies, sports, and news of the era, and of the artifacts in the room.

A control group also lived in the 1959 world for five days, but they were just told to reminisce about it as the past.

Researchers found that the group that acted 20 years younger showed marked health improvements compared with the controls. They sat taller. They looked younger. Their eyesight improved.

In short, they let go of their “shoulds” and had fun together. As a result, their brains, bodies, and moods changed in just five days.

Thankfully, living in a time capsule isn’t a requirement for gaining some of the same benefits those participants had.

Try these tips for allowing yourself to let go of the attitudes that are weighing you down — and have more fun.

### 1. FIND THE FLOW

When you’re caught up in the feeling that you should be doing something, you’re struggling. In these situations, you may feel like you’re not in charge of your own life. There’s a push-pull going on inside: You can’t seem to find your flow. Flow, which signals the absence of inner resistance, happens anytime you’re engaged in an activity that you choose freely.

### 2. UNBLOCK YOUR FLOW

If you’re never having fun or feeling any sense of flow, it may signal that you’re committing again and again to the very “should” that is blocking your life. Try to figure out what’s getting in your way and envision a path through it. This usually requires some inner work, like a mindfulness practice or talking to a supportive friend or therapist.

### 3. MAKE A CHANGE

In her poem “Autobiography in Five Short Chapters,” Portia Nelson describes falling into the same deep hole in the street three times while gradually understanding her mistake.

You may spend a long time falling into the same pits over and over, at least until you start to take more ownership of your life. A mindfulness practice can help you recognize your patterns and gives you a fighting chance to finally walk around them toward something new.

### 4. BE MORE OF YOURSELF

Each of your fumbling attempts to stop stepping into your favorite holes helps you get to know yourself better. You have a greater understanding of what gets in your way and of what you really want. This allows you to become more comfortable bringing your real self to all parts of your life, including to work. And that ease helps you get into the flow of life far more often.

The more you become yourself, the more you feel good in your own skin, the more you can open yourself up to fun. When you have that inner freedom, fun — just like joy — arises spontaneously.

---

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



# Invest in Financial Intimacy

Talking about money can be hard, but sometimes we have to do it — especially if we manage finances with another person. Establish healthy habits and effective communication with these strategies.

BY JON SPAYDE

Personal finance is a tough topic. When we share our money life with a partner or spouse, the complicated dynamics of close relationships come into play, and we can experience even greater stress. Differences between partners in income, debt burden, attitudes toward spending and saving, and other factors can lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and resentment.

They may even bring about “financial infidelity” — hiding money-related behaviors and

issues from partners — a form of unfaithfulness that can be as devastating to a relationship as a sexual affair.

Psychotherapist Thomas Faupl, LMFT, SEP, offers some guidance to couples for whom sharing money is a source, or potential source, of relationship strain. Based in San Francisco, he’s a practitioner of financial therapy, where the focus is on a person’s core beliefs, behaviors, emotions, and interpersonal relationships concerning money.

## Stress Sources

**You and your partner have different attitudes and habits concerning money.** Perhaps one partner is comfortable managing money and the other is not. “One is a saver, the other a spender. These differences come up in relationships, and why? Because opposites attract!” Faupl notes, adding that while being opposites can make a relationship more exciting, those differences are also where people often get stuck.

**You and your partner have significantly different financial histories, incomes, or earning potential.** If one partner has a high-paying job, a significant inheritance, and no debt, and the other has student loans and a modest income, the couple may be uncertain of how to establish equitable ground rules for sharing financial responsibilities.

**You’re worried about how financial issues will affect the dynamics of the relationship.** “Money questions can bring up major power issues,” says Faupl. “Like, Who has control? Who has veto power? So how do you have a financial partnership that’s equitable for both partners?”

**You are anxious about trusting another person with your financial affairs.** “Money is a primal issue for a lot of us,” says Faupl. “Some people really treasure their ability to control their finances, all by themselves.”

**You don’t know how, and on what terms, to start the shared-money conversation.** You may feel so anxious about money matters in general, and sharing finances in particular, that you anticipate awkwardness or conflict in the discussion. So how should you approach it?

**You’re not certain what financial sharing should entail.** Should the two of you have a joint account or separate accounts? Do you merge everything or keep certain things separate? “All these questions need to be navigated,” Faupl says.



# Strategies for Success

**Think of discussing money as a way to find out more about your partner and yourself.** Rather than holding tightly to set ideas and trying to convert your partner to your point of view — an approach that almost always guarantees conflict — Faupl advises seeing money discussions as inquiries and opportunities for greater intimacy.

“Couples can agree that they’re going to explore this issue as a way to get to know each other on a different level,” he says. “I encourage couples to have an *inquisitive* approach to their relationship with money, and to ask, ‘How do we become a good financial team?’”

Because the use of money is so intimately tied to what we consider important in our lives, discussing it opens a precious window into the values and priorities of both partners, he points out.

**Strive for a compassionate understanding of your partner’s point of view.** “Whether a person is a spender or a saver by inclination, or whether they know how to manage money or don’t, they are trying to bring parts of themselves to the money relationship that they think are important and of value,” Faupl says. “It’s really wise to explore where you can have empathy for what your partner is trying to contribute, whether that is more care and frugality, more spontaneity and fun, or whatever. This doesn’t mean that you have to agree with what they’re trying to do, but you can communicate to your partner that you really are trying to hear them and to see their perspective on money.”

**Start the discussions as early as possible.** Faupl recommends proactively communicating about money issues and financial values. The discussion can start as you begin to get serious about each other, even before a definite commitment, he says. “An early discussion is so much better than waiting until a crisis — until one partner says, ‘What on earth is this credit-card charge for?’”

On the other hand, Faupl adds, it’s never too late to begin talking to avoid a buildup of resentment and anger, which could result in an impasse in communications.

**Discuss goals.** “Once you and your partner have been honest and clear with each other about your values, then you can move to the more granular level,” Faupl says. What does your financial future look like? Do you need to save to make home repairs, to put kids through college, or to retire?

**Set up a specific structure.** “Next, it’s important to decide on a structure that you both agree on,” explains Faupl. “It might involve choosing a particular budgeting-software system or other method of keeping records. It might be a joint account, individual accounts, or a combination. Some couples merge everything; that’s something I see in older couples, and in some younger ones too. But if you’re going to put everything in one pot, you’d better have some clear agreements up front!”

**Consider a combo shared-and-individual plan.**

A setup that works for many couples, Faupl notes, is a joint account plus individual accounts. To accommodate differences in income, couples can establish a proportional split in contributions to the joint account.

With the individual accounts, there can be an agreement that each partner will inform the other when they’re planning personal spending in excess of an agreed-upon amount. “That way,” he says, “a new Lexus doesn’t appear in the driveway as a total surprise to the other partner.”

**Make records and share them.** Faupl underlines the importance of writing down your basic financial plans and sharing your records with one another, so there is something to refer to when disagreements arise. “One thing that really trips couples up is when they’re

arguing about money and there’s no spending and savings plan document that has the numbers down in black and white,” he says. “The argument becomes nothing more than a battle between different perceptions about what’s happening.”

**Regularly schedule your money meetings.** It’s important to establish a schedule of money meetings — Faupl advises meeting once a week to start — so you don’t drift into conflicting perceptions about what’s happening.

**Seek outside support.** Couples can also spend time capitalizing on the wealth of available financial-education resources by taking a class, tuning in to a webinar, listening to a podcast, or reading a book or articles.

And if couples are having a hard time or feeling like they aren’t making progress, Faupl recommends reaching out for help. “Because there is help out there,” he says. “The field of financial therapy is developing rapidly and it can create a safe space for couples to work through these issues.”

He notes that many couples, especially younger ones early on in a relationship, come to him for guidance about money matters well before problems arise. 📍



**JON SPAYDE** is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

## FIND FISCAL WELLNESS

Discover more tips for promoting financial well-being at [ELmag.com/financialhealth](http://ELmag.com/financialhealth).



# Healthy & Bright

WITH  
Experience Life

VISIT [ELMAG.COM/LTGIFT](https://ELMAG.COM/LTGIFT)  
TO ORDER A GIFT SUBSCRIPTION TODAY.



# What Is Foot Reflexology?

This trigger-point therapy can relieve a range of discomforts.

BY COURTNEY HELGOE

**O**n my last work trip to New York City, I was feeling desperate. Walking endless blocks through January snow squalls did nothing to dent my travel insomnia, and my mood, focus, and digestion were a mess. I finally stopped into a Sixth Avenue storefront with a large reflexology foot map in the window, where a stoic practitioner plunked my feet into a tub of hot water to start the treatment. That night I slept like a stone.

## The Practice, Explained

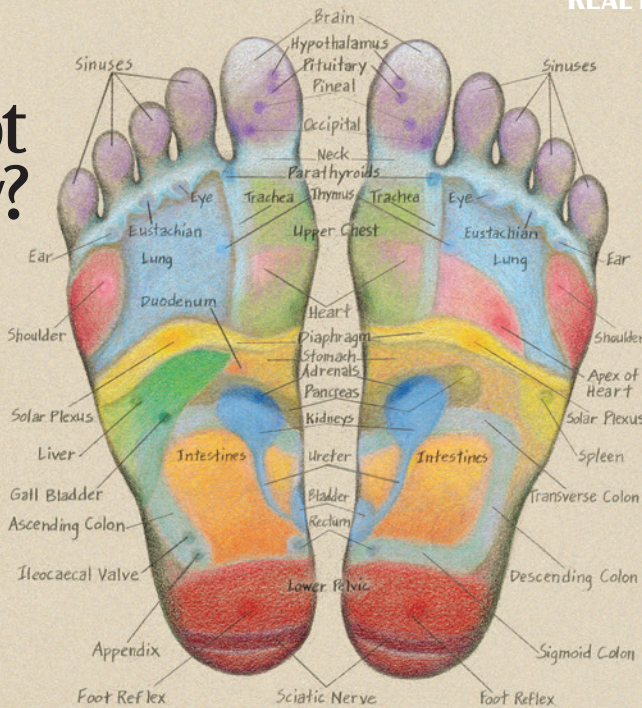
During my treatment, the practitioner pressed and massaged various spots on my feet and toes. At one point, he leaned into a spot on my foot's arch, and the pain in my lower back spiked. "Your back is tight," he observed, without removing his hands from my feet. The pain subsided, then disappeared.

Such insight never fails to shock me. How did he know I could feel that in my back?

The answer is not strictly mystical: He'd located a trigger point. These points put the "reflex" in reflexology, and they're why a foot treatment can ease a variety of travel woes in less than an hour. All the relevant organs (including the racing brain) have corresponding points in the feet.

"Working with the feet affects the entire energy body and physical body," explains integrative physician Ann Marie Chiasson, MD, MPH, in her book *Energy Healing*. "This is why reflexology is so effective."

Reflexology points are similar to, but not synonymous with, points used during acupuncture. And the goal



of these modalities is the same — to release blocked energy.

"A reflexologist may feel the energy move from a point of pressure on the feet . . . throughout the body," explains Karen Teagarden, ARCB, a certified reflexologist who writes on the topic for the University of Minnesota's Center for Spirituality and Healing. "When working on the spleen and gallbladder points, the practitioner can access the points and at the same time feel a flow of energy."

## Then and Now

One of the earliest known foot maps is a pictograph in an Egyptian tomb. Discussions about the connection between foot points and vital energy appear in 3,000-year-old Chinese medical texts.

In the early 20th century, several American physicians mapped out vertical and horizontal zones with corresponding pressure points. William Fitzgerald, MD, first wrote about the zones in 1917, after learning that applying pressure to a zone relieved pain during minor surgeries.

Today, research shows reflexology can provide symptom relief in a wide range of contexts. One meta-analysis published in 2023 found reflexology can relieve pain and fatigue for people with multiple sclerosis. Another

study, from 2020, indicates foot reflexology reduces pain and anxiety for burn patients having their wound dressings changed. A study published in 2021 shows reflexology helps relieve nausea and vomiting during cancer treatment. Additional research has found reflexology helpful for sleep disturbances, migraines, and restless legs syndrome.

There are several theories for how reflexology works: by regulating the

central nervous system, by reducing stress, or by keeping the body's vital energy flowing. Still, as with many traditional practices, it's impossible to pinpoint the exact mechanisms at play, much to the aggravation of skeptics. All we know with certainty is that these treatments routinely provide relief.

## Reflexology in the World

Because reflexology involves easy access points like the feet and ears, it's often part of complementary healthcare programs in hospitals. Some massage therapists offer it as an add-on service. And while reflexology is not technically massage, it can produce the same degree of relaxation and well-being — all while the recipient remains fully clothed. This makes it a good stress- and pain-relief option for the shy.

To find a practitioner, check the national directory of the American Reflexology Certification Board. Or walk into the nearest storefront with a reflexology foot map in the window. A certified practitioner is sure to know how your feet connect to the rest of you.

**COURTNEY HELGOE** is the *Experience Life* features editor.



# Deep Roots

Exploring the lands of your ancestors brings a new understanding of who you are and where you come from.

BY JILL PATTON, FMCHC

Andrea Hanson expected her trip to Africa to be transformative. She didn't expect her transformation to begin before she even left JFK Airport.

A graduate student in social work, Hanson was headed to Ghana last December for a research internship. She was the only Black person from her university on the trip, but virtually everyone else boarding the plane to Ghana that day was Black.

"To see an entire area at the airport filled with Black people — I had never experienced that before," she recalls. Her initial reaction was one of confusion. "It just felt so foreign."

Hanson is of West African descent, which she discovered via Ancestry.com's DNA testing program. After a year of deep personal losses — her grandmother, mother, and brother had all recently died — this trip to Ghana had personal as well as academic meaning for her.

"In my family, your elders usher you into being an adult," she explains. "I didn't have my elders. But my family believes we walk with our

ancestors — that they're with you. So going to Ghana felt like not just a return for me but a return for them too."

Arriving in Africa awakened in Hanson an overwhelming sense of connection to her roots — one she had craved but never experienced so intensely.

"I can't explain the feeling of seeing all these people who looked like me," she says, reflecting on the rare experience of not being in a minority. "I felt safe. I felt like I was just 'Andrea,' not 'a Black woman.'"

## A New Era in Ancestry Travel

Hanson's reaction to arriving in Ghana is common for people of the African diaspora returning to Africa, says Gina Paige, PhD, cofounder and president of African Ancestry. For 20 years, the organization has used DNA testing to help people trace their family lineage not just to general regions but to present-day African countries and specific ethnic groups.

"Time and time again I hear people say, 'I immediately felt like I



Andrea Hanson (above) on a beach in Ghana, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The flag of modern-day Ghana (left).

was home," notes Paige. "The feelings and the experiences are visceral."

African Americans have been returning to Africa for generations. In the 1950s, Henderson Travel Service, the first Black-owned international travel agency catering to African Americans, planned trips for clients who wanted to visit the continent. The agency relied on a chartered plane to take its first group to celebrate Ghana's independence in 1957.

The experience of ancestry travel is different for African Americans than for Americans whose ancestors hail from, say, Europe.

"Black people are the original victims of identity theft. We don't know our names, we don't know our languages, we don't know who our ancestors are," explains Paige. "So, unlike an Irish person who knows that their family lived in *this* village and enjoyed *this* lifestyle, and who can look up records in the local archives, we can't do that because of slavery."





Hanson (above) at the entrance to the female dungeon at Cape Coast slave castle. The harbor at Winneba, Ghana, is now a thriving fishing port (above left).



The Door of No Return at Ghana's Cape Coast "slave castle" (above) through which enslaved people were shipped away from their homeland.

All the same, Paige believes traveling to Africa can be a profound experience.

"This is why what we do is so important and impactful: We tell people the exact county and tribe they came from," she says. "Heritage travel is powerful for Black people because it fills a void. It tangibly connects us to lost traditions, cultural practices, values, and spirituality."

### Welcoming Their Children Home

In 2019, the government of Ghana launched an initiative to invite African diasporans home to Africa. Called the Year of Return, the program commemorated 400 years since the arrival of the first documented enslaved Africans in the United States.

"Ghana is considered the gateway to West Africa," Paige explains, and for many people returning to Africa, the journey starts there, where so many of their ancestors' journeys into slavery began.

At the height of the slave trade, Ghana was the "point of no return" for many stolen Africans; more than 40 "slave castles," where African people were sold to traders and sent across the Atlantic, lined the country's coastline. Ghana's ongoing Beyond the Return campaign seeks to sustain the momentum of the 2019 program.

Hanson didn't go to Ghana to participate in an official returning, but she nonetheless experienced a feeling of return with each place she visited and each person she met.

"The first time I went to the water, I got really emotional," Hanson recalls. "I don't know if people understand how meaningful it is to see the Atlantic Ocean from the other side, to recognize there's someone within my lineage who never got a chance to look from this perspective again."

Hanson says her visit has forever changed the way she looks at her ancestors, and at herself.

"I remember standing in one of the slave castles and feeling sad, and then angry — and then I just had this huge feeling of gratitude," she recalls.

"I realized I'm not just some little Black girl who came from slavery. My story is vast and huge. I thought of my ancestors, and I realized you can't survive something like this and not be made of magic."

Hanson intends to return to Africa with her husband and children, and she's considering doing DNA testing through Paige's organization to learn more about her family's lineage.

"There's still so much unknown," she says. "I don't have names. I don't have pictures. But I know this is where our story started." 📍

### HAVE DNA RESULTS, WILL TRAVEL

The type of DNA tests you might consider will depend on the level of genetic information you're seeking to augment your ancestry travel experience, explains Kyle Betit, senior genealogist and travel-program operations manager for ProGenealogists, the professional services division of Ancestry.

"The AncestryDNA test is an autosomal DNA test, which means it's looking at all of your chromosomes — all of your ancestors on your mother's side and your father's side of your family tree," Betit explains.

Autosomal testing provides a snapshot of your ethnicity indicating regions of the world where your ancestors were living in the past 1,000 years. Most autosomal testing services offer a list of living relatives who have also tested with that service. AncestryDNA, for example, maintains a database of 22 million people, enabling you to find relatives and make connections.

"The other two kinds of tests that are commonly used are the Y-chromosome test, which looks at your father's father's father's line, and the mitochondrial DNA test, which looks at your mother's mother's mother's line," Betit says.

Specifically, Y-chromosome testing for those assigned male at birth identifies the Y-chromosome haplogroup, the ancient group of people from whom your patrilineage descends.

Mitochondrial DNA tests trace your matrilineal ancestry through mitochondria, which are passed from mothers to children. African Ancestry uses these tests to identify the countries and tribes of their clients' ancestors going back as far as 2,000 years.

Of course, you can enjoy a meaningful experience visiting the lands of your ancestors without taking a DNA test or doing genealogy research. But the more you know about your great-great-greats and beyond, the more you can discover about not just them but yourself.

**JILL PATTON, FMCHC**, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor and a certified functional-medicine health coach.





## NOBULL Rec Trainer

\$129 | [www.nobullproject.com](http://www.nobullproject.com)

Your versatile training shoe for all-day action. Engineered for working out with a look that easily blends into the rest of your day.

## NOBULL Ripstop Short

\$72 | [www.nobullproject.com](http://www.nobullproject.com)

Get into your grind with this durable, lightweight track short that moves with you. The stretch of the textured ripstop stands up to abrasive workouts.



## Wilson Clash V2 Super Tour Backpack

\$109 | [www.wilson.com](http://www.wilson.com)

This Super Tour Backpack holds up to two tennis rackets in a padded compartment with locking zippers. Additional features include a side zip pocket lined with Thermoguard to keep water or snacks cool, a ventilated pocket perfect for dirty shoes or clothing, and an interior sleeve in the main compartment for laptops or tablets.





## Wilson Clash 26 V2 Tennis Racket

\$129 | [www.wilson.com](http://www.wilson.com)

The Clash 26 V2 sets the bar high for design, comfort, and game-changing performance in junior rackets. Coated with a rich red finish for a sleek look on the court, this racket feels remarkably arm-friendly thanks to its FORTYFIVE° carbon construction.

## Wilson US Open Extra Duty 3 Ball Can (24 Pack)

\$120 | [www.wilson.com](http://www.wilson.com)

For more than 40 years, every point at the US Open has been scored with a Wilson US Open tennis ball. Unparalleled consistency and performance make it the gold standard in tennis, trusted by the best in the game when it's all on the line.

## Saladmaster Cookware

Visit [www.saladmaster.com](http://www.saladmaster.com) to locate a dealer near you!

Saladmaster is more than cookware. It is a health and wellness company that provides tools to cook in a healthier way without the need for oil or water while maintaining more nutrients in your food.



## Power Plate MOVE

\$3,395 | [www.powerplate.com](http://www.powerplate.com)

A versatile, whole-body vibration platform, perfect for warm-up, workout, and recovery.



## Power Plate Mini+

\$180 | [www.powerplate.com](http://www.powerplate.com)

Limited-edition color! This ultracompact, whisper-quiet portable handheld massager offers maximum massaging capabilities to keep you moving better.



NOBULL



NOBULL COURT TRAINER  
**CONTROL THE COURT**



[NOBULLPROJECT.COM/LIFETIME](https://NOBULLPROJECT.COM/LIFETIME)





## Look to the Trees

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

**My family** has always loved weeping willows. In Cheshmeh Safid, the Iranian village where I spent parts of my childhood, there were multitudes along the water's banks. To this day, the memory of those trees makes me smile.

Over the past decade, my family has planted many willows along the marshy creeks and tributaries that run through our farm in Minnesota. It's mind-blowing how quickly they've grown — you would never guess that many of them are just 8 to 10 years old.

These graceful, broad-crowned trees offer beauty and fond memories while also contributing so much to the environment, which is why we plant them. Tree planting is one of the best, most immediate strategies we have to combat climate change, specifically the rapidly rising amounts of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in our atmosphere.

CO<sub>2</sub> is a greenhouse gas that both traps and radiates heat. As the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere exceeds what our planet's natural processes can remove, the greenhouse effect increases, disturbing all sorts of natural systems.

Since the 1960s, as global GDP per capita has nearly tripled, global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have *quadrupled*, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. And each year, CO<sub>2</sub> levels continue to rise, posing real, immediate danger.

This is a severe environmental crisis, and while many are actively working and innovating to reverse course, "someday" solutions are not enough — we need them now.

My engineering brain always searches for the simplest, most actionable solutions, and for this problem,

planting more trees is one thing most of us can do. These sophisticated, natural CO<sub>2</sub> filters offer an answer that's accessible and actionable, and that pays immediate dividends.

Through photosynthesis, trees remove carbon dioxide from the air, store it in their trunks, branches, leaves, and roots, and release oxygen into the atmosphere. More trees means more sequestered carbon, which can help mitigate climate change.

**My engineering brain always searches for the simplest, most actionable solutions, and for this problem, planting more trees is one thing most of us can do.**

Not only can trees defend us and our existence, but they also take care of one another. They communicate. They're social. They nourish each other. Mature canopy trees nurse saplings beneath branches, providing shade and shelter from the sun and wind and replenishing the surrounding soil.

Connected through forests, trees are invested in mutual growth, looking out for the other vegetation around them. They care for the sick and elderly, providing barriers and protection while sharing water and nutrients. They seem to understand the collective whole is greater than the individual parts.

And therein lies our greatest lesson: Like the trees themselves, we have to work together to address the

many challenges that face us — one of the most urgent being climate change.

The best way to accomplish that is through massive alignment: to connect at the root, recognize our duty and responsibility, and take deliberate action. In this case, it's planting more trees.

I urge you, passionately and urgently, with everything in me, to participate. All of us — individuals, organizations, communities — *can* take action and make a meaningful difference collectively. (Life Time is committed to the second part of our mission: Healthy People, *Healthy Planet*, Healthy Way of Life. Moving forward, we will be focusing a significant portion of the Life Time Foundation's efforts on this initiative.)

So let's join forces, learn as much as we can, and plant as many trees as we can for our respective environments. Share what you've planted and encourage others to do the same.

Give trees as gifts; donate to trusted organizations that will plant them on your behalf. Talk to your city and local organizations and representatives about bringing more native trees into your neighborhood and community.


If we act immediately and deliberately, I truly believe we can start to reverse the effects of rising CO<sub>2</sub>.

And let's keep looking to the trees. Along with the oxygen they provide, they offer living, breathing proof of how natural communities can come together to endure hardship, heal, and, in the rhythm of the seasons, flourish for generations.

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





A photograph of a woman and a young child looking up at a starry night sky. The woman is in the foreground, wearing a dark blue hooded jacket, and the child is behind her, wearing a blue denim jacket with a fur-lined hood. Both are looking upwards with expressions of wonder and joy. The background is a dark, starry sky with some light trails.

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking.

**I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive.**

— JOSEPH CAMPBELL





# URX

Ultimate RepairX

PAIN CANCELED.  
TISSUE RESTORED.

100% Natural

# Recovery Starts

# How? Before You Begin

At Ultimate RepairX, we're driven by a singular passion: to provide you with a pain relief solution that stands above the rest. Our journey began with a team of visionary physicians who were initially focused on breast cancer prevention.

Through their extensive research, they made a groundbreaking discovery – the pivotal role of the Extracellular Matrix (ECM) in cell health.

These dedicated physicians realized that by supporting the ECM and facilitating the delivery of nutrients for storage and future use, cells could repair and replace themselves more efficiently. This, in turn, empowered the body to heal itself more effectively. Moreover, they recognized that bolstering the ECM played a crucial role in preventing additional stress, diseases, and chronic conditions, such as inflammation, which is often the root cause of many health issues.

This profound understanding led to the creation of Ultimate RepairX, a pain relief solution that not only addresses immediate discomfort but also promotes holistic recovery and overall wellness. Our mission is to empower you to take control of your health and well-being by offering a natural, effective, and scientifically validated approach to pain relief and recovery.

Join us on this journey of transformation and experience the difference that comes from supporting the ECM – the foundation of your body's vitality.

88%  
customers

Experienced relief  
in less than 5  
minutes

93%  
customers

Began feeling  
relief after only  
ONE use



“The first day of using URX I began to feel relief. Now the pain has almost totally subsided after 3 days.”  
— R. Bartlett

Available  
now!

LIFECAFE







# AWAKEN ENERGY

Race and train in a colorful kit  
that expresses your best self.

