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Experience Life

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November 2022

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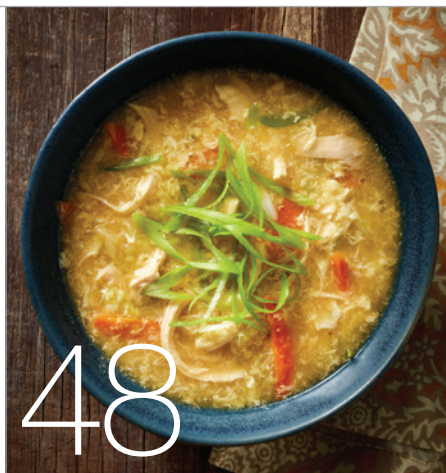
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Find out how to upcycle your pumpkin into a festive treat for local birds. ELmag.com/birdfeeder

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PICTURE CREDITS

Cover, p. 2 (far right), and p. 16: **Gregg Delman**.

Page 4: (top) **Maddie Augustin**; p. 7: **Sara Rubinstein**; p. 11: (left column) **Terry Brennan**; p. 12: (top left) **Terry Brennan**; p. 35: (bottom right) **Trent Bell**; p. 37: (bottom) **Chad Holder**; p. 58: (top left and center) **Eric Eul**, (top right) **Kelly Loverud**; p. 75: (Wahls headshot) **Hannah White Photography**; p. 77: (bottom) **Vik Orenstein**.

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

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LIFE TIME
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Grounding often requires little more than a willingness to slow down, settle in, and **be aware of your here and now.**"



YOUR THOUGHTS?

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Right Here, Right Now

“*This moment is my life. I move more deeply and quietly this morning. The energy underneath the noise and movement asks only for me to join it. I do not will this moment to be something that it's not. I inhale what is, receiving everything this life has to give.*”

This text is excerpted from *Morning Affirmations: 200 Phrases for an Intentional and Openhearted Start to Your Day*, by Jennifer Williamson. It's one of several books stacked on my bedside table, and the one that I picked up on a recent Saturday morning. Committed to leaving my phone plugged in and out of reach, I opened the book to a random page and landed on these words.

They were apropos: I was mulling over what to share with you in the spirit of this issue's "In the Moment" theme, and suddenly, right in front of me was a reminder to be right here, right now. To not feel rushed or pressured to do anything other than exist, join, and receive. To simply be present.

So, I was . . . for a while. Then my mind started turning, because an idea was sparked.

I recalled a 2020 episode of the *Life Time Talks* podcast with guest and colleague Brie Vortherms, MA, LMFT, cocreator and director of Life Time Mind, a performance-coaching program. We were still in the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Brie joined us to discuss how anxiety manifests in our bodies. Research was showing that more than a third of adults in the United States were dealing with symptoms of the condition at the time. To support us through, she offered guidance on when to seek professional help, and she shared in-the-moment practices we could use when we notice our anxiety levels rising.

One of those practices was "grounding." Brie explained that taking the time to get grounded in our environment helps to connect our minds with our bodies, release tension and anxiety, and improve focus. Grounding often requires little more than a willingness to slow down, settle in, and be aware of your here and now. One example of this exercise works like this:

First, settle into your seat, sitting tall with your feet flat on the floor. Inhale and exhale a few rounds of deep breaths, and then notice what's around you.

- Name **five** things you can see.
- Name **four** things you can hear.
- Name **three** things you can feel.
- Name **two** things you can smell.
- Name **one** thing you can taste.

I've returned to this exercise a lot lately: as I'm juggling the morning routine to get the kids out the door for school, as I'm editing pages, and as I'm lying in bed, quieting my mind for sleep. It helps me to be fully in the moment that is my life.

As we approach the holiday season — a time of year that perennially leaves many of us in a state of overwhelm (and when so many are already struggling with burnout) — my hope is that this exercise can be a resource for channeling presence and calm for you, too. (For a handy PDF to guide you, visit ELmag.com/groundingpdf.)

We all need and deserve the time to simply *be* . . . and to make the most of all these moments that make up our lives.

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

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Talk to Us



AUTOIMMUNITY CHALLENGES

[On “Demi Church’s Success Story,” July/August 2022]

f It’s great that Demi Church found something at her age to help with her autoimmune disorder. I am 69 and have been struggling with this condition since my early 40s. I have tried multiple approaches — diet, supplements, yoga — and still struggle every single day.

Recently, one of my physicians ordered more autoimmune blood tests, and they showed my cortisol level was 1.9 — far below the normal levels of 6 to 8. That explains a whole bunch of symptoms I have been dealing with for many years that were treated with medications that really didn’t work. I am excited that my quality of life will really improve if this is properly treated.

Shari L.

f I have three autoimmune diseases. I go to an amazing herbalist. I’ve also been on steroids for 14 years now to manage my Addison’s disease. My coping mechanisms: yoga, walking, biking, journaling, Bible study, and a great hubby and family for support.

Patty N.

@ Great story! Graves’ disease is not spoken about enough, and Western medicine’s approach to “treating” this thyroid autoim-

mune disease is barbaric.
@l1nda.e.watk1ns

LIFE-CHANGING OIL

f I have been taking CBD oil for more than five years (“Is CBD Effective?,” July/August 2019). It was life changing for me. It gave me my active life back. It stopped my knee pain, helps me sleep better, and lowered my minor anxiety. I will always take the oil to sustain the active life I love.

Holli B.

HEALTHY TRANSITIONS

@ Very good advice (“How to Quit Your Favorite Food,” April 2018). I have been following this advice for years, and my numbers are all within the normal range; I’m 73. I started eating one healthy meal a day; that meant I had one-third of my diet under control. As I used up the bad food, I replaced it with the healthy food, and then I was able to easily transition into a healthy-eating habit. Keep up the good work.

Howard W.

UNEXPECTED DISCOVERIES

@ I like the typologies described in “Your Fitness Personality” (November 2008). They helped me understand why I might like certain types of activities. I did fall into some unexpected categories, though.

Ruth W.

WELL-ROUNDED WELLNESS

@ I will pass this great article on to my patients (“19 Ways to Invest in Your Health and Well-Being,” March 2020). I basically share nearly all your points with my patients in some form, but I appreciate your succinctness with each point.

I believe you missed one other important way to support your health and well-being, however, and that is seeing a chiropractor on a regular basis. As with seeing your dentist regularly, maintaining a healthy nervous system and an aligned spine promotes well-being. Plus, contrary to an allopathic medical approach, many chiropractors promote and coach patients on a healthy lifestyle.

Benjamin G., MA, DC

TIMELY REMINDERS

@ Thank you for this refresher on walking correctly (“Relearn to Walk,” April 2017). I’m experiencing a very long recovery from a total knee replacement, and this is just what I needed today as I learn to walk again with a new knee and a poky quad muscle.

Jennifer S.

Be sure to watch for the piece we’ll be doing in early 2023 on walking and its health-and-fitness benefits!

@ It’s interesting that I received this article today (“Fitness Fix: Weak Side-Butt,” October 2016). I have been on a weight-loss journey for the past two years. Three days a week I walk 2 miles, and three days a week I work out in the pool. I eat healthily, and I have lost 94 pounds and still have some more to go. I was just journaling my concerns this morning — I think I have reached a plateau. So I really appreciate this information on correct floor

exercises. Positioning is a very strong element in effectively targeting exercise. Thank you!
Denise C.

@ I tore my left Achilles tendon in 2004 during a soccer match, and I wasn’t able to fully run or play soccer for six months after my recovery (“Bill Does Yoga,” January/February 2014). During this period, I started practicing yoga, and I’ve been doing different variations of it since then. It has been a life-changing experience physically and mentally, and I recommend it to everyone. I honestly believe that if more people did yoga, we would have a healthier, more peaceful world.

Abby R.



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How Our Brains Improve With Age

Senior moments, losing your spectacles, forgetfulness: We've long made light of the idea that our brains — along with muscles and most everything else — decline as we get older. But a growing body of research, including a 2021 study in *Nature Human Behavior*, suggests that certain cerebral abilities actually improve with age.

"Our findings, together with other data, argue against theories positing general age-related declines in attention and executive functions," writes study leader João Veríssimo, PhD, of the University of Lisbon. "Even though aging is widely viewed as leading to cognitive declines, it in fact yields multifaceted outcomes, including a range of benefits."

The prevailing belief is that many aspects of our cognition improve until we reach our early 20s, explains Jim Davies, PhD, a professor at the Institute of Cognitive Science at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, in a commentary published in *Nautilus*. After that, "fluid intelligence" — thinking about new things, quick thinking, and abstract reasoning — gradually declines. Or so it was thought.

Multiple studies have found that older adults consistently display lower

accuracy or slower performance of certain cognitive functions. These include episodic memory; learning, recognition, and retrieval of words; learning of complex new skills and sequences; and visuospatial abilities.

The trajectory of these declines varies dramatically: Some are slow and gradual; others may occur quickly later in life.

Yet research is showing that other areas of cognition are enhanced as we get older, such as "crystallized," or knowledge-based, aspects of cognition. These include vocabulary; word or semantic knowledge; verbal- and general-information comprehension; expertise at tasks one practices often; and wisdom.

Crystallized knowledge improves with age, "but with slower returns as we get older," Davies notes. This pattern is believed to continue into our 70s, he adds; after that, things begin to decline.

At the same time, older people have been found to outperform younger adults in emotional regulation, aspects of decision-making, and wisdom.

Veríssimo and colleagues evaluated a sample of 702 participants between

the ages of 58 and 98. Controlling for sex and education, as well as declines in general thinking speed, motor control, and perception, the team measured participants' performance on a range of cognitive markers.

The researchers tested aspects of fluid intelligence by breaking it down into parts — alerting, orienting, and executive control. They used the standard Attention Network Test, which measures how fast people hit a button in response to images shown on a screen.

As expected, older people were slower at alerting: Their response time declined at an average of 6.3 milliseconds every year.

But orienting (locating images on screen) and the executive ability to inhibit irrelevant and incongruent information increased, at least until the mid- to late 70s. Other studies have backed up these findings.

"Given that orienting and perhaps especially executive function underlie many other — particularly higher-level — cognitive capacities, age-related improvements in these attention [and] executive functions probably have downstream effects on the wide range of cognitive abilities that use them, including spatial navigation, long-term memory encoding and retrieval, decision-making, reasoning, mathematical abilities, and language processing," the authors conclude. "The importance of the observed effects may therefore be substantial."

— MICHAEL DREGNI

“Even though aging is widely viewed as leading to cognitive declines, it in fact yields multifaceted outcomes, including a range of benefits.”

GETTING YOUR Daily Protein

Experts often recommend making sure you're getting enough protein to support optimal fitness. Not only does it support a lean body, but it also improves satiety, increases overall calorie expenditure, enhances recovery from exercise, and improves bone density.

A person typically needs 0.4 to 1 gram of protein per pound of body weight per day, depending on their gender, activity level, and goals. (For more details on daily protein intake, see ELmag.com/protein.)

Instead of focusing on a total daily amount, what may work better is designating a total number of grams to shoot for per meal. That way, if you need 140 grams per day, for example, you know to aim to consume 30 to 40 grams of protein at each of four meals per day.

Common animal and plant sources of protein include the following:

- **Animal:** chicken, turkey, pork, beef, lamb, bison, seafood, eggs, and dairy.
- **Plants:** soy, beans, legumes, lentils, grains, nuts, and seeds.

Here's how portion sizes for just a few of them might look.



CHICKEN BREAST

A standard 3- to 4-ounce serving of boneless, skinless chicken breast is about the size of a deck of playing cards and contains 30 grams of protein.



TOFU

This soy-based option is often a staple source of protein for those following a plant-based diet, but it's suitable for omnivores, too: 1½ cups of cooked tofu contains 30 grams.



GROUND BEEF

Most cuts of beef have 7 grams of protein per ounce, so a 4-ounce serving of ground beef will deliver around 28 grams. Compared with chicken, beef contains more fat (and calories from fat), along with iron.



TUNA

Fish and shellfish are good sources of protein; most fish fillets and steaks contain an average of about 6 grams per ounce. Tuna packets are portable and convenient sources of protein: A 2.5-ounce packet provides 17 grams.



DAIRY PRODUCTS

Though it's a common allergen, dairy can be an accessible source of protein and fat for many. One cup of yogurt provides 8 to 12 grams of protein. Cheeses offer 6 to 10 grams per ounce. A cup of 2 percent cottage cheese will give you 25 to 30 grams of protein.



BEANS, PULSES, AND LEGUMES

Beans and their like are powerhouse foods. They're often overlooked as a protein source, although they contain plenty — plus fiber. Just ½ cup of cooked black or pinto beans, or lentils or split peas, provides 7 to 12 grams of protein.

— ANIKA CHRIST, RD, CPT



THE JOYOUS Workout

Forget the notion that workouts are all work and no play, says research psychologist Kelly McGonigal, PhD, a Stanford University lecturer and author of *The Joy of Movement: How Exercise Helps Us Find Happiness, Hope, Connection, and Courage*. There's ample evidence from multiple studies that exercise — even in small doses — can boost your mood.

In fact, researchers have a not-so-technical name for it: the feel-better effect. "Human beings are hardwired to take pleasure in the activities, experiences, and mental states that help us survive," McGonigal explains. "These instincts are buried in our DNA and spring to life in each of us, as fundamental to our survival as the abilities to breathe, digest food, and pump blood to our muscles."

In her book, she offers research-backed ways to find joy in exercise.

GET OUTSIDE. Exercise in your backyard, at a park, or anywhere that gives you a dose of nature. Since we evolved outdoors, we're forever connected to nature, McGonigal writes. "Being active outdoors can help us tap into the human capacity for mindfulness, as well as the transcendence of being connected to something bigger than ourselves."

GROOVE WITH OTHERS.

Whether you work out with one friend or in a class, "human happiness flourishes in community," she notes. "Throughout human history, movement — whether labor, ritual, or play — has helped us to connect, collaborate, and celebrate."

MAKE IT FUN. Find the joy in play, challenges, or competition. Tackling obstacles as a team brings out a different side of participants, she explains.

MOVE TO MUSIC. Listen to music and you almost can't help but dance. "The brain seems to be hardwired to hear music as an invitation to move," McGonigal writes.

— MD



Well Informed

IN PRAISE OF Prunes

A 2022 Penn State University study suggests that prunes not only keep our plumbing operational but may also prevent bone loss in postmenopausal women.

By middle age, we all begin to lose more bone cells than we can easily replace, but women tend to struggle more than men with this process. When their estrogen levels dip after menopause, it triggers an inflammatory response that disrupts bone-cell restoration. That's why women are more likely to develop osteoporosis.

Prunes could be a game-changer, notes study coauthor Mary Jane De Souza, PhD. "Fruits and vegetables that are rich in bioactive compounds such as phenolic acid, flavonoids, and carotenoids can potentially help protect against osteoporosis," she explains.

De Souza's team reviewed data from 28 preclinical and clinical trials and concluded that the minerals, vitamin K, phenolic compounds, and fiber in prunes help lower inflammation, ease oxidative stress, and reduce bone loss.

The mechanism by which this occurs remains a mystery, but researchers believe the fruit triggers changes in the gut microbiome that cool inflammation in the colon, thus suppressing levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines, which has the salutary effect of slowing oxidation throughout the body.

The study was partially funded by the California Prune Board, which may invite some skepticism. And then there's the matter of just how much of the fruit we might need to consume each day to gain the desired bone-preserving effect.

Trial participants who ate 100 grams (about 10 prunes) every day for a year experienced improved bone mineral density in their lower spines and forearms as well as fewer signs of bone loss overall.

— CRAIG COX

Building Immunity WITH EVERYDAY HABITS

COVID-19 has turned the spotlight on the topic of immunity in recent years, yet even as the pandemic wanes we still need to support our immune system so it can fight off viruses, bacteria, and other potentially compromising invaders.

There are lifestyle habits within our control that can build our immunity, explains Paul Kriegler, RD, CPT, director of nutritional products at Life Time, in a *Life Time Talks* podcast. "Being healthy at a metabolic and system level matters a lot with regard to whatever pathogen we encounter," he notes. "The choices we make from meal to meal and day to day have the biggest impact on our ability to be resilient. I think it's empowering to tell people that message."

Kriegler recommends these daily lifestyle habits that offer essential immune-system support:

EAT A HIGH-QUALITY, NUTRIENT-DENSE DIET. "Diet quality is a major controllable factor we should all be paying attention to," says Kriegler. He recommends eating a protein-rich diet and consuming about a head-size portion of produce (or five cups or more) every day. He also stresses the importance of staying well hydrated.

GO OUT IN NATURE. In addition to providing the immune-supportive benefits of vitamin D, natural sunlight helps regulate our circadian rhythms, as well as other physiological processes and systems.

GET ADEQUATE SLEEP. At least seven hours per night tends to produce the best immune resilience.

MANAGE YOUR STRESSORS. Stress is healthy in short bursts but not at the constant levels modern life tends to cause. Include intentional stress-management techniques in your routine to promote relaxation.

MOVE YOUR BODY. "Our bodies do upregulate certain immune processes and abilities when we place little calculated amounts of stress, like exercise, on it and then allow it to recover," says Kriegler. Along with regular exercise, he also emphasizes consistent daily movement.

— EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF



BOOST YOUR IMMUNITY

For further advice on strengthening immunity, listen to the *Life Time Talks* podcast with Paul Kriegler at ELmag.com/immunitypodcast.



Seniors' Most Common Mental-Health Issues

A life stage characterized by change and loss as well as wisdom, the senior years present unique mental-health challenges and opportunities. Older adults and their loved ones can navigate these waters by staying attuned to age-associated risks and the protections that support well-being.

Major Adjustments, Existential Questions

Seniors contend with a range of challenges specific to aging, says licensed therapist Tamara Statz, MA, LMFT, who specializes in treating older adults, families, and caregivers. One of the most common involves feeling that the body or mind is failing. While neither type of failing is easy to confront, physical decline can at least carry a sense of predictability.

“We typically have an idea of what the next steps might be, or what future decline will entail,” Statz explains. “By contrast, the unknowns of cognitive decline often feel scarier — more unknown and uncertain for the individual and their loved ones. They often worry, ‘How long until Mom doesn’t recognize me anymore?’ or ‘Will there come a time when they don’t think to feed themselves?’”

With cognitive and physical impairments come a host of practical considerations — such as whether to continue driving and whether to stay in one’s home — that can generate painful emotions in their own right.

Meanwhile, seniors may simultaneously contend with difficult choices and emotions surrounding a partner’s physical or mental decline. This

experience is especially difficult when memory loss is involved: A loved one may be physically and emotionally present but psychologically absent. What’s more, the “living loss” may go unrecognized by others.

“To peers, family, and friends, the person is still physically alive and present day to day, so the loss might not be validated and supported,” explains Statz. “It can be a time of tremendous anticipatory grief and ambiguous loss, as the person is physically present, but, to a degree, cognitively absent, in cases of dementia or memory loss.”

When a spouse dies, the survivor must contend not only with grief but, in many cases, existential questions about their own identity and mortality. And the recognition that time is limited brings significant, sometimes painful, personal reckoning.

Aging and Depression

Aging itself is not a risk factor for mental-health problems. In fact, most mental-health disorders start in adolescence or early adulthood, and some, like social anxiety disorder, may fade with age.

When it comes to mood disorders, such as depression, the picture is more complicated. Evidence suggests that cognitive and mood impairments often go hand in hand, and while it’s unclear which comes first, studies suggest that of the two, depression — whether paired with cognitive decline or not — is more harmful to quality of life.

Statz believes depression is both overdiagnosed *and* underdiagnosed among seniors. “We as a society have a narrative that aging is inherently

depressing, so we might not see that an aging parent is really struggling.”

Meanwhile, normal responses to grief and loss can also be mistakenly labeled as depression.

Aging Happily

For all the challenges of aging, many individuals become more, not less, content in their later years. Researchers have described this phenomenon as a U-shaped curve, in which mental well-being declines in middle age before rebounding later in life. One 2016 study even plotted a steadily upward-rising line from youth to old age.

And though the prospect of dwindling years can be frightening, recognizing that one has only so much time left may also ignite a sense of purpose. Even reflecting on death itself can foster positive emotions.

“For some, the unknowns can be stressful. But for others it can be exciting, especially if they feel strongly in their faith that heaven is the destination for them,” says Statz.

To paraphrase an old saying, aging is not for the faint of heart. Yet there are gains alongside the losses. When we cultivate meaning and connection and decide what to hold on to and what to release, the golden years can be just that: golden. 🌟

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC

“We as a society have a narrative that aging is inherently depressing, so we might not see that an aging parent is really struggling.”



DELVE DEEPER

For a longer, more detailed version of this article — plus more on depression concerns — see ELmag.com/agingmentalhealth.

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ENVIE

BY **LORI BERGER**

PHOTO BY **GREGG DELMAN**

Trailblazing dancer
and new mom
Misty Copeland
shares her
perspectives on
mentoring, activism,
and resilience
as she prepares
for a return
to the stage after
a three-year hiatus.

During the pandemic, while most of us were figuring out how to navigate our workdays through Zoom, Misty Copeland had plenty going on to keep her on her toes — but she wasn't performing on the stage of the American Ballet Theatre (ABT).

The ABT's principal dancer (Copeland was the first Black woman to be promoted to the position) wrote two books, launched her nonprofit foundation, became cofounder of an athletic-wear company, taught a MasterClass ballet program, and guided projects in development at her production company. Oh yeah — and she had a baby, too.

Resilience and a can-do attitude have served her well from the time she took her first ballet class at a Boys and Girls Club in San Pedro, Calif., at the age of 13.

She was living in a small motel room with her mother and five siblings at the time and wasn't aware that most of her competition had been taking ballet lessons since they were toddlers. She'd soon discover that the majority of ballerinas were white, petite, privileged, and oftentimes starving themselves to stay in the game.

"As a young 20-something-year-old, I don't think I was savvy enough to understand the politics of things," she recalls.

Yet Copeland, ballet's most outspoken ambassador to underserved communities, never considered abandoning her dream. "I think growing up without a lot and watching my mother survive and overcome so much instilled the fighter in me," she says.

Copeland laughs when asked whether she considers herself an overachiever, but then she carefully reflects on her 24/7 schedule. "I think there's just always more to be done," she says. "I definitely say yes to way too many things, but I have amazing people in my life who help to provide balance. People like my husband, and my manager, Gilda, and other mentors I've had in my life, have helped me not run myself into the ground."

The indomitable dancer may be facing her biggest challenge yet as she prepares to return to the stage for ABT's 2023 season after three years away. She recently turned 40, and only seven months have passed since her son, Jackson, was born. "I just had a baby, and my body is completely different now," she says. "I have to look at myself in a different way."

Copeland's respect for her body has allowed her to let it heal before subjecting it to any rigorous fitness regimens. "I'm really interested to see, when I get back into ballet class, what's going to be difficult or different, and how I can get to that new place that I want to be. I've reset my technique several times throughout my career to be the best dancer I can be. So, I understand that mindset of switching things up and trying something new and starting from scratch. I enjoy that journey."

Experience Life recently connected with the new mom and discussed mothering, mentoring, and her excitement about returning to the stage next year.

WWS

Q & A



With Misty Copeland

EXPERIENCE LIFE | Let's start out with the latest and greatest news: You're a mom! How did you manage to have a baby without the world knowing about it?

MISTY COPELAND | I've managed throughout my career to keep the things I want to keep private, private. I just dressed and wore things that didn't show off my belly. I wanted to keep it something that my husband and I enjoyed and experienced together and could keep to ourselves. It was an awesome pregnancy, and our life is amazing with Jackson now. I never could have anticipated the joy he brings us.

EL | Your latest book, *The Wind at My Back*, comes out in November. What inspired you to write this book on the heels of your last book, *Black Ballerinas*?

MC | Mentorship has been a huge part of my life, dating back to when I was 7 years old. So this book is really about sharing the life lessons I learned from my mentor, Raven Wilkinson.

Raven came into my life at a critical time in my professional career. She showed me a purpose for myself that was bigger than me as an individual or my career. This book is about how she influenced, inspired, and guided me on my journey to become a principal dancer.

Writing *Black Ballerinas* just before this was a nice buildup to telling Raven's story, because I was telling the stories of the women who came before me. Raven was the first Black woman to dance in an elite ballet company in the United States, and I hope it will inspire others to go after these incredible relationships with their elders.

EL | You're involved in countless mentoring programs, and many of your books and outside projects are tributes to the women who have helped guide

you and your career. Why is mentorship so important to you?

MC | I can't imagine *not* doing it. I think it's a powerful example to set for the next generation. It's a beautiful thing, to respect your elders and to continue to carry on their stories and create a beautiful lineage for generations to come.

It's not just about people coming into your life and giving you advice — you have to be ready for it and open to it. I tell a lot of the young people I mentor that there is work to be done on their end as well. If you're not present and ready to take it all in, it's not going to do you any good.

EL | How has your husband, Olu Evans, been a support for you?

MC | I moved to New York City when I was 17 years old and met Olu while he was finishing law school at Emory University. He was my first boyfriend, and he had a lot more life experience than I did.

He's helped me on this journey to navigate the world I'm in and have the different conversations necessary with bosses, choreographers, or whoever it is. Dancers aren't often guided that way. As performers, we're taught to be seen and not heard. Olu helped me find my voice.

I credit his mother, who is an incredibly strong woman and was a single mom, for making him so introspective, attentive, and secure. He's got a special understanding of people.

EL | You launched the Misty Copeland Foundation in September. Why was this important to the work you do?

MC | The foundation provides outreach to children in under-resourced communities and engages their minds, bodies, and hearts with programs and learning through dance. We will also be advancing the art form of ballet, through greater diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our Be Bold program will offer a first step in dance education, especially for boys and girls of color.

EL | When you started dancing, did you plan on using dance as a platform for your activism?

MC | Growing up, that was a big part of my identity, navigating that space of being biracial and a Black woman in a white space. I always stood firm in who I was in that space.

By the time I became a professional dancer, it hit me that it was bigger than I thought. I had the opportunity to be seen by so many young Black people who could look at me and think, *Oh, that's a direction I could go.* And now it's been years and years of putting in the work, doing the outreach, and speaking and mentoring children that's built this thing.

EL | You've been a role model for women and body image. What's your advice for women who are too hard on themselves and their bodies?

MC | The first thing I always say to the younger dancers I mentor is, "There's so much power in our individuality and uniqueness as human beings." We lose that when we compare ourselves to other people or try to be someone we're not. It's about being your healthiest self and having a healthy, strong body you can be proud of.

EL | With so much going on, how do you manage to find some me-time?

MC | It's a hard balance. I don't have that much of a personal life outside of my family. I've always kept a small circle of friends, and I have a pretty strict schedule when I'm performing.

But at the end of the season, I make sure I make the time to get away with my husband and rest. We put that time into my schedule. During the season, I'm pretty much on. During our rehearsal season, we have Sundays and Mondays off, and I literally try to do nothing. For the most part, I will sleep all day! 🌙

LORI BERGER is a Los Angeles-based writer.



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EASE

Into Mindful Friendships

Become a better friend by thoughtfully considering how you show up in your closest relationships.

BY **SPIWE JEFFERSON, CMP, JD**

Research shows that cultivating healthy social connections is critical to our well-being. In addition to reducing stress, loneliness, and isolation, friendships can promote happiness and self-confidence, as well as a sense of purpose and belonging.

Infusing friendships with mindfulness and practicing self-awareness can help you build more mutually satisfying relationships. Acting with compassion and without expectations is a proven way to be good to your friends — and good *for* them, too.

Take the EASE approach to fostering fruitful friendships.

ENCOURAGE your friends in their positive endeavors. Be the cheerleader you would want to have supporting you. Practice being mindful of the temptation to compare yourself with them. It can lead to envy and create unconscious obstacles that damage friendships.

ACCEPT people as they are. It's not your place to fix anyone. Notice when a tendency to judge arises: Are you evaluating someone's wardrobe choice or relationship decisions? Use this information as an invitation to ask yourself if you're overstepping or imposing your own values on your friend.

SUPPORT friends by showing up and helping to carry their burden when they're feeling down. Friends come out of the woodwork when you're riding in a limo; a true friend will be there to ride the bus with you and be by your side when you're unable to move.

Attune yourself to signs that your friends could use extra care. For example, maybe one of them has been absent from group gatherings for a while or has been communicating less frequently than usual. While maintaining healthy boundaries, consider reaching out to see whether you can help.

ENJOY time with friends and don't take life too seriously. Mindfully observe when complaints constitute too much of your conversation. Take the opportunity to choose joy and fun more often when you're together. Your capers today will be beautiful memories tomorrow.

SPIWE JEFFERSON, CMP, JD, is the author of *Mindful in 5* and host of the *Mindful in 5* podcast.



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


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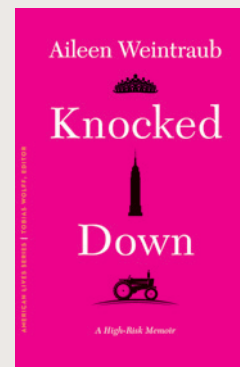
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Best-Laid Plans



While on bed rest for a high-risk pregnancy, a writer faced her fear of commitment as her new marriage and home were falling apart around her.

In her recently published memoir, Aileen Weintraub documents her experience with a high-risk pregnancy.

BY AILEEN WEINTRAUB

It was 2006. I was 18 weeks pregnant, barely showing a baby bump, and walking around New York City with my new husband, Chris, when I felt an unusual pain in my lower belly. We canceled our plans for our day in the city and returned upstate to the Hudson Valley and our rickety old farmhouse, which Chris had recently inherited. I called my doctor, but the nurse dismissed my concerns and told me to wait for my scheduled appointment the next day, which I did.

The exam was going well until a look of concern spread across my doctor's face and I was rushed to an emergency sonogram. It revealed that three huge fibroids were competing for space with my baby. One of them was pressing against my cervix and causing early effacement — changes that don't usually happen until shortly before birth.

The doctor turned to me and said, "You'll be lucky if your baby makes it to 24 weeks." Then she labeled me high-risk, which meant that there were potential complications that could harm me and my unborn baby.

By the end of the appointment, the doctor's message was clear: Go to bed and stay there until the baby starts to crown.

I was 32, and this was our first child; it felt like our world had come crashing down.

Flight Risk

The next day, my husband and I confirmed the diagnosis with a specialist. Then we picked up grilled-cheese sandwiches, my last meal of freedom, and headed home.

After we finished our lunch, my husband kissed me goodbye and left to sign the papers on a new power-equipment business we had just purchased. We had sunk

every bit of our money into this shop, and now I was suddenly unable to help.

As I pulled back the sheets of my bed, I paused. Was I really going to do this? For five months? I'd never stuck with anything that long.

In first grade, I dropped out of Brownie Girl Scouts, and I'd been dropping out of things ever since:

Hebrew school, the first out-of-state college I attended, even my job at a publishing company. But now I had no place to run.

What would happen if I refused to commit to bed rest? Would I lose my baby? What was I willing to risk? With nothing else to do, I slipped into bed. I would try it and see what happened.

Every hour of every day, I fought the urge to throw back the sheets and flee. My husband marveled that I'd embraced bed rest so quickly — that I was casting aside my own needs for our unborn child's. But no one knew how much I was struggling inside.

I tried to distract myself with freelance work as a writer and editor, but I couldn't focus. I began slipping into a darkness I later learned was prenatal depression.

Even meals were difficult. My husband packed a cooler by my bed every morning with cheese, nuts, and vegetables. I timed my bathroom breaks; I was allowed one two-minute shower each day. I felt trapped in my own home and in a body that continuously betrayed me.

It wasn't easy for Chris, either. Not only was he taking care of a bedridden wife and a new business, but our farmhouse desperately needed repairs and we were drowning in debt. Our

My husband marveled that I'd embraced bed rest so quickly — that I was casting aside my own needs for our unborn child's. **But no one knew how much I was struggling inside.**

marriage was so new that we hadn't yet developed the foundation necessary to handle these seismic changes. As the house began to crumble from neglect, so did our relationship. My desire to leave intensified.

Finally, I'd had enough. By the time I'd been on bed rest for 14 weeks, Chris and I had stopped communicating. I was alone for 12 hours a day, and I hardly saw another human being besides the doctor. The loneliness was unbearable.

So I ran away. I fled to Brooklyn, to the safety of my mother's apartment.

While I was there, my mother nurtured me in a way that I hadn't realized I needed. As I reclined on her sofa, visiting with old friends, listening to the familiar sounds of the city outside her window, eating comfort food she had painstakingly prepared, I thought back to my childhood.

My father struggled with depression and didn't work for years at a time. Finances were always a source of contention in my parents' marriage. My mother could have left, but she didn't. She did what she had always done: take care of her family. She was doing that right now. I gradually realized it was my turn to take care of my own.

After almost two weeks in Brooklyn, I told Chris I was coming home. I hoped with this newfound commitment our problems would dissolve, but we had so much to discuss, so much to sort out, and I knew it would take time.

Building a Family

Our son was born healthy, on his due date, after 36 hours of labor and an emergency

Aileen at nine months pregnant in 2006.



C-section. But just because my baby was outside my body didn't mean everything was suddenly fine.

There were days I wasn't sure how I would survive motherhood. Sometimes I would get into my car to go to the grocery store by myself and imagine what it would be like to just keep driving. Being a new mother felt almost as isolating as being on bed rest.

But then I would remind myself that I was strong, that I'd been through so much, and that I could do hard things. I found support and solidarity from other moms when I joined a local parenting group.

I took it day by day, sometimes hour by hour. I found solace in small moments — in the sweet scent of the baby's skin, the fresh air filling my lungs on walks in the woods.

Chris was getting used to our new business and wasn't home much, but we survived and, slowly, we healed. We began talking more, spending time together. We found a babysitter, and we made a standing date for Monday-night dinner and a movie. We went on long hikes every weekend with our baby and our dog.

In this way, we reconnected. We had some pretty tough conversations, too, about what we hoped to change and how we could find ways to support each other.

Today, our son is 15 years old and an amazing athlete. Chris and I understand each other in ways we had yet to discover so early in our marriage. We've both learned that marriage takes work; it's about being present and listening and responding to the other person's needs.

I still occasionally feel the urge to run away when life gets messy, but I have the tools to work through those feelings. I take time for myself, slow down, book a family vacation, or simply take a walk.

Sometimes I sit down at my desk and write. That is how my book *Knocked Down: A High-Risk Memoir* was born. By writing my story, I have been able to release the trauma I experienced on bed rest, giving it light and space in the world, and, I hope, allowing other women to understand that they deserve to be seen and heard.

My high-risk pregnancy and my early struggles with motherhood helped me understand what it means to stay and fight for the things that matter most, which is a lesson I'll carry with me forever. ☺

Aileen's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

BE KIND TO YOURSELF.

Nurture your mind and body the way you would nurture a loved one. This can be as simple as recharging by taking a walk or a bath or reading a book you enjoy.

2

ADVOCATE FOR YOUR NEEDS.

Find healthcare professionals who see and hear you. Ensure they take your concerns seriously. If you don't feel you're getting proper care, speak up or change doctors.

3

ASK FOR SUPPORT.

Step back, acknowledge your limitations, and normalize reaching out and asking for help when you need it.



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Real Fitness



Dancing is a workout in disguise. And you don't need to have any experience to enjoy moving to the music — just the willingness to let go and groove.

Page
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Learn about the benefits of dance-based fitness, from barre to Zumba.



SPLIT LEVEL

Hone your strength — and optimize your recovery — by splitting your workouts into upper-body and lower-body training days. These two workouts show you how.

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

Welcome to one of the most contentious debates in fitness circles: whether it's best to do split training — dedicating one session to your legs and the next to “bi's and tri's,” for example — or full-body training, which prioritizes efforts that address multiple body parts and movement patterns in one session.

Split training typically modifies a conventional strength program by targeting specific muscle groups (such as upper or lower body) or movement patterns (push versus pull) on separate days.

In contrast, full-body training addresses the whole body in every workout session.

As the popularity of functional, full-body training has grown in

recent years, split training has been increasingly — and, some would say, unfairly — dismissed by its critics as nonfunctional. But many experts, including Life Time strength coach Nick Sandoval, NASM, NCSF, NESTA, contend that each training style has its place and can lead to transformational results in health and performance.

Why Split Your Routine

By training certain muscle groups and movement patterns on different days, “a split program allows for optimal training volume and also allows each of the groups a chance for full recovery to ensure peak muscle strength and growth,” explains Sandoval.

For those reasons, split training may be particularly suitable for exercisers looking to maximize strength gains; those seeking body recomposition (increased muscle mass and decreased body fat); and athletes who need to plan their strength training around sport-specific workouts and competitions.

People who are short on time per workout often prefer split training, too, because each session is typically shorter than a full-body session, says Sandoval.

Split training often requires working out at least four days a week to hit all muscle groups and movement patterns (upper-body push and pull days, lower-body push and pull days).

Not tending to all these elements can result in muscle imbalances. “People often train muscles they can see — the chest, shoulders, arms, and quads — more than muscles they can't see, like the back, hamstrings, glutes, and calves,” he explains.

For folks who like the structure of working out most days of the week, this aspect of split training is often desirable.

But for those who have limits on the number of days they can (or want to) strength train, split training may not be the best option. Full-body regimens are great for people who have only two or three days per week to train but can devote more time per session.

Ready to give split training a try? “My favorite approach is a four-day split consisting of days focusing on the lower body, upper-body pushing, upper-body pulling, and total-body strength movements — with three days of recovery throughout the week,” says Sandoval.

He offers two sample workouts to be performed on different days.



GET MORE

For full exercise descriptions for the following workouts, visit [ELmag.com/splittraining](https://www.elmag.com/splittraining). For an upper-body pull workout that rounds out this split-training program, visit [ELmag.com/splitpullworkout](https://www.elmag.com/splitpullworkout).

UPPER-BODY PUSH WORKOUT

INSTRUCTIONS: This upper-body workout focuses on the push movement pattern. Perform four straight sets of 12 to 15 reps of each movement (per side, as applicable) before moving on to the next exercise. Rest for up to three minutes between sets.



1. BARBELL BENCH PRESS

Unrack the barbell and begin with your arms extended, wrists stacked over the elbows and shoulders. With control, lower the bar to your chest. Without bouncing, press the bar back up over your chest.

2. BARBELL SHOULDER PRESS

With an overhand grip, and hands about shoulder width apart, begin with the barbell at shoulder height.

Brace your core and glutes, and press the barbell straight overhead. With control, return the barbell to shoulder height.



3. ALTERNATING DUMBBELL CHEST PRESS

Grasping a set of dumbbells, lie back on a flat bench and position the weights at chest level. Press one dumbbell straight up toward the ceiling, pause briefly, and then lower the weight back to chest level.



Repeat, this time pressing the opposite weight. Continue in this fashion, alternating sides on each repetition.

4. INCLINE DUMBBELL CHEST PRESS



Position the back of an adjustable bench at about a 45-degree angle, and sit back with two dumbbells at your chest.

Press the weights straight up toward the ceiling until your arms are fully extended. Lower the weights with control.

UPPER-BODY PUSH, CONT.

5. STANDING CABLE CHEST FLY

Position the arms of a dual-cable machine at (or slightly above) shoulder height. Press the handles straight out in front of you.

With control, allow the arms to open wide. Return to the starting position by bringing the handles together at chest height.



6. CABLE TRICEPS EXTENSION WITH ROPE

Facing a cable machine, hold the rope attachment with both hands at shoulder height.

Push down on the rope, extending your arms straight down. Return the rope to shoulder height.



LOWER-BODY PUSH-AND-PULL WORKOUT

1. BARBELL BACK SQUAT



Standing with a barbell positioned across your upper back and with your core braced, bend your knees and push your hips back into a squat.



Maintaining an upright, neutral spine, reverse the movement to return to standing.

2. DUMBBELL ROMANIAN DEADLIFT

Stand tall with one dumbbell in each hand so the weights hang down in front of you, against your thighs. Maintaining a flat back and a slight bend in your knees, hinge at the hips and allow the dumbbells to trail down the front of your legs.

Keeping the dumbbells as close to your legs as possible, lower until you reach the end of your range of motion. Reverse the movement with control.



INSTRUCTIONS: This lower-body routine combines push and pull movement patterns. Perform four straight sets of 12 to 15 reps of each movement before moving on to the next exercise. Rest for up to three minutes between sets.

3. PLATE-LOADED MACHINE LEG PRESS

With your core engaged, feet flat on the platform, and butt on the seat, press the weight away from you. Pause, then lower the weight with control.



4. DUMBBELL GOBLET REVERSE LUNGE

Stand holding the end of one dumbbell with both hands at chest height. Keeping your shoulders squared over your hips, step back with one foot.

Lower until your front knee forms a 90-degree angle. Step your back foot forward to reverse the move. Complete all the reps on one side before switching.

5. SEATED LEG EXTENSION



Sit at a quad-extension machine and adjust it to ensure that your knees are next to the hinge point on the machine (on Life Time equipment, this is indicated by a red dot) and so your ankles are behind the padded bar.



Lift your legs to extend them forward. Pause briefly at full extension, and lower with control.

6. PRONE HAMSTRING CURL

Lie face-down on the leg-curl machine, with the roller pad resting against your lower calves, above your heels and ankles.

Actively press your hips into the bench and bend your knees to draw your feet as close to your glutes as you can.

Pause for a moment, then extend your legs and return your feet to the starting position with control. ↻





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The Spinal Rock

This supine rocking drill can help mobilize your spine, massage your back, strengthen your core, prevent injury — and even put a smile on your face.

Engage your core to maintain a rounded back and generate power for the rocking motion.

Do not strain, use momentum, or hold your breath. Inhale in the seated position, and exhale through the rocking motion.



Keep your back rounded throughout the entire move. Avoid straightening your spine. If your lower back slaps against the ground, round your back more.



Keep your knees bent and close to your chest.

Avoid rolling back onto your neck.

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

Rocking is a dynamic and practical movement that few adults practice consistently or efficiently.

Spinal rocks boast myriad benefits: They support back health by improving spinal mobility and massaging the muscles around the spine; activate and strengthen the abdominal muscles; boost proprioception in the back-body; improve sense of balance and spatial reasoning; and build awareness of how tension and relaxation work together to generate power safely.

Rocking and rolling on the ground in a controlled environment may also

improve your ability to manage an unexpected fall.

Yet most people don't typically include spinal rocks in their fitness routines — and those who do try rocking might find the motion a bit awkward, uncomfortable, or too easy. If you've avoided the move, consider this a friendly invitation to give it another try.

Watch for common pitfalls, such as straightening the spine instead of rounding the back throughout the movement, using momentum instead of engaging the core, being too relaxed or too rigid, rocking too quickly

without control, and getting thrown off by feeling off-balance or as though you're about to fall.

The goal while rocking is to keep your back rounded and knees close to your chest, and to activate your abs. It's a deceptively simple move, and one that can be progressed to increase difficulty.

The feeling of falling usually wears off with practice. And rocking is exactly that — a practice. It's important not to take it too seriously; if you feel silly, try reframing your thoughts to "This is pretty fun!"

These tips can get you started with rocking — and rock your fitness world.

PHOTOS: GOLIN SIMMONS; STYLING: PAM BRAND; MODEL: KELSEY MARTIN

INSTRUCTIONS

1

Sit on the floor and bend your knees, drawing them up to your chest. Allow your back to softly round, and engage your core. Lightly place your hands on your shins, or grasp the backs of your thighs.

2

Round your spine, allow your weight to shift backward, and roll along the length of your spine, from hips to shoulders.

3

Shift your weight forward to return to a seated position, spine still rounded.

4

Repeat for one minute, using as little momentum or assistance from your hands as possible.

+

PROGRESS THE MOVE

Learn four ways to boost the challenge of rocking at ELmag.com/spinalrock.

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

LET'S DANCE

Release your fears and challenge your body and mind to feel the beat.

BY **LAUREN BEDOSKY**

Think you need to be a Dancer-with-a-capital-D to take a dance class? Fear you're not coordinated or fit enough to tap into the rhythm of the music and let your body flow? You can probably come up with plenty of reasons not to dance, but in doing so, you're missing out on the benefits of this multifaceted form of movement.

Whether you choose a fitness-focused class like Zumba, a craft-based class like jazz dance, or a form of dance with cultural ties, moving to a beat can challenge you both physically and mentally.

"Dancing is a workout in disguise," says Jeimy Bueno Prisby, a Life Time elite performer and virtual performer development coach. It gets you moving, twisting, and shaking in all directions and brings your heart rate up. And it's fun. "You forget you're working out," she says.

Physically, dance is a creative and effective cardio workout. It can help improve heart and lung function; improve balance, agility, and coordination; and build some muscle and bone strength.

Emotionally, dance can be a phenomenal mood booster and stress reducer: Dancing induces your body to release serotonin and other feel-good hormones.



In addition to these benefits, multiple studies have found that dance provides cognitive, antiaging, and social boons as well.

- Social dance, including ballroom, Latin, and swing, has been shown to increase the size of the hippocampus, a region of the brain involved in learning and memory.

- Dancing improves cognitive flexibility, the ability to adapt to new or changing situations. This can help keep the mind sharp and is associated with reduced risk of dementia.

- Tango dancing is associated with improved balance and gait in older adults.

- Other benefits include the social connections formed with classmates or a partner; the potential for

enhanced cultural understanding (many forms of dance are linked to heritage); and the practice of embracing a beginner mindset by routinely learning new moves.

Consider this expert advice for letting go of preconceived notions about your dancing ability and finding a dance style that will help you get moving.

Get Out of Your Head

One of the most common stumbling blocks people face when debating whether to take a dance class is the fear of looking foolish.

"I have students who worry about embarrassing themselves, and I keep telling them, 'Everybody is looking at themselves. No one is looking



Remember It's a Skill

Many people assume they need inborn talent to dance, but that's simply not true. "There's nothing in our DNA or in our blood that says one person can dance and another can't," Nafei-Jamali explains.

She encourages students to abandon hang-ups around being good, especially when just getting started. Like any other activity or movement pattern, dancing is a skill you can develop and hone. Focus on feeling the rhythms and learning the steps; you can add style later.

What's more important than whether or not dancing comes



Learning to dance is like learning a new language.
Give yourself time. And practice."

at you," says Niosha Nafei-Jamali, owner of Niosha Dance Academy, a dance studio in San Jose and Pleasanton, Calif., that specializes in Persian dance, belly dance, ballet, and Zumba. Keep that in mind lest your fear of judgment prevent you from joining a class.

If you're nervous, consider taking a spot in the back of the room as you follow along at first, and then move closer to the front as you become more comfortable and confident, Bueno Prisby suggests.

Online dance classes are a great entry point for nervous beginners. Nafei-Jamali has recently been teaching classes via Zoom exclusively, and Bueno Prisby leads live classes via the Life Time Digital app.



naturally is having a willingness to meet yourself where you are, regardless of age, ability, or fitness level. "Learning to dance is like learning a new language," Nafei-Jamali says. "Give yourself time. And practice."

Nafei-Jamali and Bueno Prisby suggest modifying moves as needed in ways that suit your body, skill level, and energy. When in doubt about how to modify a movement, communicate with your instructor.

Find a Class

Unless you have a strong preference or dislike for certain types of music or dance, there's no reason not to try various classes until you find something that clicks.

The options at health clubs and dance studios run the gamut from fitness-forward dance classes, like Dance Jam, Zumba, Jazzercise, and Aqua Dance, to classes featuring skill-focused and culture-based styles, such as jazz, bachata, flamenco, belly dance, bhangra, and more.

Consider what type of music you like and whether you're more interested in solo, partner, or group dancing. And be honest with yourself about your skill level and the experience required for a class. For instance, don't sign up for an advanced swing class if you're new to partner dancing.

If you're hesitant to try a full-on dance class, dip your toe in the water with barre, which draws inspiration from ballet, or Pilates, which many dancers use to build strength or recover from injuries.

Once you find a class you'd like to try, sign up. "You might love it, or perhaps it's not for you at the moment — but unless you try, you can't say, 'It's not for me,'" says Bueno Prisby. "You have nothing to lose and all the smiles and movement to win." 🎯

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

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Befriending My Body



When body positivity felt out of reach, our fitness editor discovered that gratitude could help bridge the gap between self-loathing and self-acceptance.

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

Speak to yourself the way you would speak to a friend.

I don't remember exactly when this directive was first hurled at me — it's lost among the dozens of fat-loss challenges and coaching groups I joined in my 20s. But I'll never forget how it made me feel: angry, frustrated, and annoyed.

At the time, my self-talk consisted largely of statements like *You're so fat. You're so slow. You're so lazy. You're disgusting. You're broken. You're useless.*

Back then, all of these statements had negative connotations in my mind. When I directed them at myself, I aimed for my body — the offending “you” — and the words exploded like bombs. Sure, they hurt. But I hoped that something strong, beautiful, and good would grow out of the damage.

When I was told to speak to myself the way I would to a friend, I was angry: *Of course* I would never say these types of things to anyone else. What did that have to do with my self-talk?

I was frustrated because I was invited to replace these statements with any number of body-positive iterations: Things like *I am strong* and *I am beautiful*. Or *I am smart* and *I am valuable*. Hardest of all for me to wrap my head around: *I love myself*.

I couldn't understand how, if I truly believed I was strong and beautiful, I could ever improve myself. In my worldview, there was failure and there

was perfection, and progress meant striving toward an ideal state.

How could I grow if I already had the qualities I desired? And what good could it do to lie to myself? Positive self-talk simply didn't make sense.

For years afterward, that one rule stuck with me: Speak to yourself the way you would speak to a friend.

I'd reflect on it with annoyance, with a kind of “Can you believe this? How preposterous!” attitude. Yet I also began catching myself in loops of negative self-talk.

One day recently, before going out for a walk, **I stepped in front of the mirror, looked myself in the eye, and told my body, “I am grateful for you.”**

Would you say that to a friend? I'd ask myself snarkily. At first it felt like an inside joke with my inner critic. But over time, my inner critic quieted down, and the way I spoke to my body began to change.

Little by little, instead of focusing on my negative opinions about my body, I was able to look at some aspects with gratitude. Exercise — specifically training for strength and performance — helped me achieve this.

I was grateful for every pound my arms would lift and grateful for every mile my legs would run. I was grateful

that my body would accept the rigors I'd put it through, and grateful that it would work so hard to recover.

Even after a painful and frustrating injury, even through the worries that I'd truly broken myself, I was grateful that my body wasn't more badly hurt. I was grateful for the function that remained, and grateful for the function that slowly returned.

Now, living through a pandemic and quickly approaching 40 — an age I long associated with falling apart — I am grateful that my body is not only holding together but strongly carrying my heart and soul forward through all the demands I place on it.

One day recently, before going out for a walk, I stepped in front of the mirror, looked myself in the eye, and told my body, “I am grateful for you.”

Inside, I thought, *Finally*. It took me a while to get here, but I am finally able to speak to myself the way I would speak to my very best, very oldest, ride-or-die-est friend.

And finally, doing so doesn't annoy or anger me. These words just made me smile, the way that kind, true words from a friend always do.



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

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Real Food



Looking for a meal that will warm you up without stressing you out? There's nothing quite like a pot of hearty soup to chase away the season's chill.

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Use up your leftover veggies in this Sunday Soup. Find the recipe at ELmag.com/sundaysoup.

Treat Your Travel Woes

Travel's pleasures and demands can take their toll. Stay on track with these foods and supplements.

BY **MO PERRY**

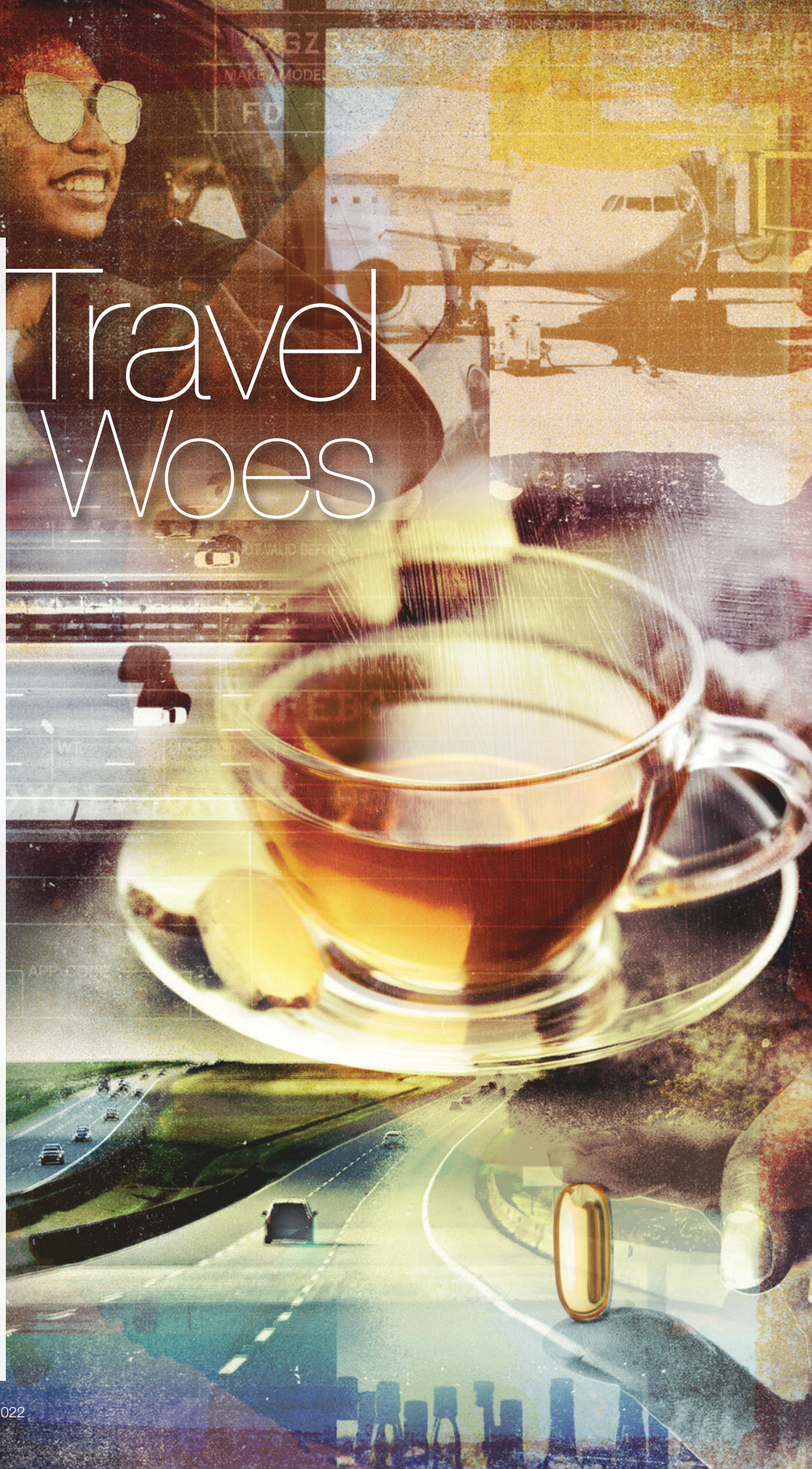
Adventure! Indulgence! A break from routine! All these things can make travel a delight. But they can also take a toll on our systems.

"Even if it's for pleasure, travel is inherently stressful," notes integrative psychiatrist Henry Emmons, MD, author of *The Chemistry of Joy*. "There's just a lot going on."

We may not have access to the foods and resources we rely on to keep us feeling great at home. And with the excitement of novelty also comes greater exposure to physiological and psychological stressors.

Though many of us consider these discomforts to be the price of travel, there are some simple nutrition- and lifestyle-based tricks that can keep you feeling steady and strong.

These are some strategies to help you conquer the most common travel woes.



Flight Anxiety

For some, boarding a plane can bring on a racing heart, shallow breathing, clammy hands, a roiled gut, and clouded thinking. “It’s basically a miniature panic attack,” says Emmons. “Your body is in fight-or-flight mode, with too much adrenaline. You can only talk yourself out of that so much.”

But you have other options. Starting about a week before your trip, consider supplementing with magnesium, a calming mineral that most of us are low in, suggests nutritionist Samantha McKinney, RD, CPT, a Life Time master trainer. (She recommends magnesium glycinate or malate.)

Emphasizing protein and fat in your meals and midflight snacks can help avoid blood-sugar swings that increase anxiety, too.

“When you’re anxious, the body releases cortisol, which can spike blood sugar, so you’re already primed for those glucose swings,” McKinney explains. She recommends opting for nuts, seeds, cheese, or hard-boiled eggs instead of foods that are starchy or sugary.

Calming supplements such as cannabidiol (CBD), passionflower, kava, or L-theanine — particularly in the form of a fast-acting liquid tincture — can also help, says Emmons. Rescue Remedy, a blend of five relaxing flower essences, is another travel-friendly option. Any of these can be taken before a flight or for on-the-spot relief.

Finally, breathing exercises are an excellent way to get grounded (even in the air). “If your breathing slows, it sends a signal to the sympathetic nervous system that it can stand down,” explains Emmons.

He suggests inhaling to a count of four, holding the breath for a count of two, and exhaling to a count of seven. “The counting is another way of distracting your mind,” he notes.

For some, boarding a plane can bring on a racing heart, shallow breathing, clammy hands, a roiled gut, and clouded thinking.

Motion Sickness

Motion sickness occurs when there’s a difference between what you’re seeing (movement) and what you’re feeling (sitting still). “The body uses different mechanisms to make sense of your equilibrium and balance,” explains McKinney. “If there’s a mismatch between the visual and inner-ear inputs that help you know where you are in space, your brain might have a hard time processing.”

Emmons notes that keeping blood-sugar levels stable can mitigate motion sickness. “Eat moderate-size snacks with some protein and fat relatively frequently,” he suggests. Think carrot sticks and hummus or a high-protein granola bar. “You want something with some fiber that’s not quickly digested.”

Ginger is another time-tested tool for calming nausea, notes Sara Jean Barrett, ND. She likes Gin Gins, individually wrapped ginger chews that are easy to toss in a bag or a pocket.

A whiff or two of peppermint oil can help settle an upset stomach as well. “An advantage of aromatherapy is that it gets into your body immediately,” says Emmons. “Anything you ingest will have a time lag.”

Homeopathic remedies, such as nux vomica and tabacum, can be a good option for those who are familiar with the specific qualities of their motion sickness. “Tabacum is good if being warm makes the nausea worse, and nux vomica is for people who feel more chilly,” explains Barrett.

These remedies are typically taken in tablets or small pellets that dissolve beneath the tongue. (Learn more about homeopathy at ELmag.com/homeopathy.)

Keeping your eyes fixed on the horizon can be helpful. Some find additional relief from acupressure bracelets that put pressure on the P6, or *Nei-Kuan*, acupressure point (about three finger-widths from the base of your palm on your inner wrist), Barrett adds. “You can also alternate gently pressing that spot first on one wrist and then the other.”

SNACKS TO PACK

Bringing your own food is a good strategy when you’re not sure what will be available. These are some easy items to pack along with you.

ON THE PLANE

- Sliced carrots, cucumbers, or bell peppers
- A small container of nut butter or guacamole for dipping
- Dried fruit (think prunes, mangoes, and cranberries)
- Trail mix
- Homemade energy bites containing nut butter, oats, chia seeds, and protein powder

ON THE ROAD (WITH A COOLER)

- Hummus, guacamole, or nut butter
- Florets of broccoli or cauliflower
- Cheese
- Pickles
- Olives
- Trail mix
- Bananas
- High-protein, high-fiber granola bars
- Berries

VISITING FRIENDS OR FAMILY

- Dairy-alternative milk
- Gluten-free bread or crackers
- Any favorite snacks to share

Sleeplessness

Anyone who has endured a restless night before an early flight knows that travel can affect sleep even before you leave home. Add in changing time zones, stress, and unfamiliar environments, and the challenges to sleep only mount.

When traveling across time zones, Barrett says, try to adapt as quickly as possible to the clock time at your destination. “Eat meals aligned with where you are,” she suggests. “If it’s morning when you land, have breakfast.” And make sure to expose yourself to morning sunlight, one of the best tools for adjusting your internal clock.

Keep your last meal of the day lighter, and eat earlier. “If your body is digesting food at night, you won’t sleep as well,” says Emmons.

McKinney adds that including a small amount (about a cupped handful) of carbs with a protein-rich dinner can support serotonin and melatonin production. Adding some sweet potato or quinoa to a meal “can be helpful to support overall sleepiness,” she says.

Taking 1 to 3 milligrams of melatonin about 30 minutes before bed can help reset your circadian rhythm. (Higher doses aren’t more effective, says Barrett; they just cause a hangover effect the next day.)

“If you’re traveling across many time zones, use melatonin for several nights, not just the first,” she suggests. Chewable tablets work, or try sublingual melatonin, which is absorbed even more quickly.

A tincture of passionflower or a mixture of the cannabinoids CBD (cannabidiol) and CBN (cannabinol) may calm a busy mind at bedtime. Sleep-promoting tea packets containing valerian root, chamomile, hops, or passionflower are easy to throw in your bag and prepare in a hotel room.

Remember that even when you’re traveling within the same time zone, altered routines and environments can present challenges. “The circadian rhythm is tied to when we exercise and eat food each day,” notes McKinney. “When that routine is shifted from our usual schedule, it can be disruptive to sleep.”

Constipation

The same factors that take a toll on our sleep — altered routines, higher stress, new environments — can also do a number on elimination. “People are off their daily rhythm when traveling, and they don’t have as much private time,” notes Emmons. “For a lot of people, the GI system kind of shuts down.”

Eating on the run is also less conducive to mindful food choices. We may get less fiber than usual or find ourselves scarfing meals in a rush. “All these things compound,” says Barrett.

Staying hydrated is a simple and important piece of the digestion puzzle. “Particularly when you fly, you want to stay hydrated,” she says; the recycled air on planes can dehydrate you quickly.

Always pack an empty water bottle in your carry-on, ideally with a filter, and fill it once you’re through security. Keep it handy on your flight and take regular sips. Bring a reusable straw if you prefer to stay masked while you drink.

Getting enough fiber is also important. “Bring your own high-fiber snacks or a meal packed at home,” suggests Barrett. Energy balls made with nut butter, chia seeds, oats, and protein powder are easy to prep in advance.

Carrot sticks with hummus make a well-balanced, portable snack. And prunes are a reliable choice for keeping things moving.

When grabbing meals on the go, emphasize veggies, fruits (especially berries), and beans, says McKinney. “Be diligent about getting that fiber in.”

Magnesium has a role to play here, too. Not only does it help with sleep and stress, but it’s also a key player in keeping us regular. “Magnesium is a good supplement for most people to take regularly — not just when you’re traveling,” McKinney says.

Emmons also packs capsules of Triphala, an Ayurvedic herbal remedy that supports gut motility. “It won’t cure constipation, but it can help prevent it,” he notes. “Start it about a week before your trip rather than waiting until you’re traveling.”

In addition to keeping you calm during a flight or long drive, practicing deep-breathing exercises can help stimulate the vagus nerve, which is critical for healthy digestion. (Learn more about the vagus nerve at ELmag.com/vagusnerve.)

When you reach your destination, take a few minutes to do some gentle yoga poses. “Anything that twists your midsection will be helpful,” says Barrett. “Squeezing, twisting, and big belly breaths can help keep things moving.”

Staying hydrated is a simple and important piece of the digestion puzzle.



Immune Protection

Nothing puts a damper on vacation like getting sick, and with the stresses of travel and the increased exposure to bugs, the risk of coming down with something rises. “Stress will tank our immune response,” says Barrett. “Plus, when we travel, we eat more treats and drink more alcohol, which will also impact the immune system.”

To boost your defenses, fortify your vitamin D levels and start taking immune-supportive mushrooms, such as maitake and reishi, a few days before you leave. “There are little packets you can mix with coffee, or capsules you can also bring with you,” suggests Barrett.

Food choices matter. “Sugary snacks and sweetened lattes are not supportive of healthy immune-system function,” says McKinney. She suggests getting fresh veggies and fruits that deliver plenty of vitamin C, such as bell peppers, strawberries, and citrus.

Emmons likes the convenience of vitamin C packets for travel, but McKinney cautions that they often contain a lot of added sugar. She prefers vitamin C capsules — 1 to 2 grams twice daily while traveling; some research suggests that combining them with zinc and quercetin may disrupt viral replication. For the best protection, begin taking them a few days before travel.

McKinney also uses N-acetylcysteine (NAC), a precursor to glutathione — an immune-supportive antioxidant that gets depleted by alcohol intake and stress. Some people find that teas containing elderberry, licorice root, echinacea, curcumin, or astragalus can also bolster defenses on the go.

While indulgence is a healthy and welcome part of a vacation, **try to take a balanced approach.**

Overindulgence

Travel almost demands that we abandon some of our usual healthy disciplines. We might overdo it with coffee or alcohol, eat foods that disagree with us, or skimp on sleep — and that’s OK! “Let yourself overindulge once in a while,” says Emmons. “Vacations are good for that!”

There’s also no need to suffer unduly from enjoying yourself. It’s relatively easy to offset the price of celebratory consumption — stomach upset, headache, bloat, fatigue, and hangovers — with a few tweaks.

“Try not to overindulge in food or alcohol too close to bedtime,” advises Emmons. Staying hydrated can also forestall a lot of problems, including hangovers and indigestion. “Drink a big glass of water about an hour before a big meal,” he suggests.

Augmenting your natural digestive enzymes with supplements can help prevent bloat, gas, and an irritated stomach. For best results, says McKinney, “take digestive enzymes with meals instead of after.”

Eating out three meals a day can be tough on the system, notes Barrett. If you have known food sensitivities, she recommends using enzymes at least once a day while traveling. An enzyme called *Aspergillus niger*-derived prolyl endoprotease can help break down gluten.

Those sensitive to dairy might benefit from taking lactase. Others can opt for a broad-spectrum enzyme to help with their sensitivities.

There are other easy techniques. “Having gum to chew after meals can help with slow or sluggish digestion, and it’s easy to carry in your bag,” says Barrett. Gum chewing keeps saliva production going; this stimulates digestion by making the body think more food is coming, she explains.

Ginger chews and ginger or peppermint tea are other handy digestive aids. And simply going for a nice after-dinner walk can pay dividends, McKinney notes. “Light movement helps the digestive tract.”

If you wake up regretting your food or beverage choices from the night before, take heart. Bitter foods, such as arugula and Brussels sprouts, and tart, stimulating seasonings like apple cider vinegar and lemon juice can help enhance digestion and support natural digestive enzymes.

“Throw some arugula in your eggs, or take bitters as a tonic,” advises McKinney. Or add a lemon slice to a big glass of water; lemon juice helps stimulate liver function.

Homeopathic remedies that can help include nux vomica, which is good for nausea, and lycopodium, which can mitigate distention and gas pain.

And while indulgence is a healthy and welcome part of a vacation, try to take a balanced approach, says McKinney. “When you’re traveling for pleasure, it’s supposed to be enjoyable. Really have that full experience in your head of how you’re going to feel in the morning.” ☘



The Best Herbs & Spices You're Not Using (Yet)

Don't get stuck in a flavor rut! Try these eight herbs and spices to broaden your culinary horizons.

BY **CAMILLE BERRY**

Without herbs and spices, our dinners would be dull. They bring dishes to life, and they allow us to put our stamp on a recipe — to make it our own.

Many folks won't hesitate to add a pinch of cinnamon or a smidge of fresh rosemary, but there are plenty of other seasonings to get to know. Adding a few of these underrated herbs and spices to your kitchen cabinet can open a world of possibilities.

Warming Spices



CARDAMOM

The pantry of virtually everyone in South Asia contains a jar of cardamom. In its native India, cooks use the seed pods to impart their sweet, citrusy eucalyptus flavor to rice dishes and curries; desserts, such as *burfi* (also spelled *barfi*); drinks, such as masala chai; and more.

Cardamom is also a common baking spice in Nordic countries, where it's used for sweet breads and rolls, like Swedish *kardemumma* buns.

Cardamom comes in two varieties: black and green. Smoky, woody black cardamom is typically used in savory dishes, while more floral green cardamom works with sweet or savory flavors. Both varieties feature anti-inflammatory properties that may improve insulin sensitivity and high blood pressure.

Toss some cardamom pods into curries and stews, or add ground cardamom to marinades or healthy baked treats. It's particularly delicious when paired with autumnal ingredients, such as pumpkins, figs, and apples. Or use cardamom to make masala chai (find a recipe at ELmag.com/masalachai).



AMCHUR

Amchur (or amchoor) powder is an Indian spice derived from sun-dried unripe green mangoes.

The tart, tangy powder adds a touch of brightness to a dish, the same way you might use a spritz of lemon or lime.

A staple in North Indian, Bengali, and other South Asian cuisines, amchur has a citrusy, subtly sweet flavor that pairs sublimely with anything savory. Undoubtedly, this is why it's a key ingredient in chaat masala, a spice mix used to season various Indian snacks known as chaat.

Think of amchur as a daub of bright paint on a blank canvas — you can use it to bring a tangy touch to any number of simple snacks, including popcorn, nuts, and raw veggies. Is that hummus a bit boring? Sprinkle in some amchur. Use a pinch to liven up fruit salads, soups, stews, and curries. Beyond the layer of flavor it adds, amchur has a practical use in marinades: Its enzymes and acidity are great for softening up tough cuts of meat.

CLOVE

The warming notes of clove are a familiar flavor in gingerbread and pumpkin-spice blends. Cloves boast a bold aroma and flavor, similar to nutmeg but sweeter and richer, with a touch of warmth.

Across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, cloves impart warmth to hearty stews, fragrant curries, and spicy marinades. In the West, the spice is a staple in baked treats, adding depth to pies, cakes, and cookies. Cloves also make a beautiful addition to hot drinks like masala chai and mulled cider or wine.

Rich in antioxidants, cloves have antibacterial and antifungal properties and may help kill cancer cells, thanks to eugenol, the aromatic compound that gives clove buds their signature flavor.

Cloves play well with other warming spices like allspice, cinnamon, ginger, and star anise. Because of the intensity of its flavor, you need only a few clove buds or a small pinch of ground cloves in your cooking or baking.



SPICES: GROUND VERSUS WHOLE

Ground spices pack more potent flavor than whole spices. They're ideal for baking, as well as for sauces, soups, stews, and marinades — anything with a smooth texture. When cooking on the stovetop, add ground spices to the pot briefly before adding liquid, so they have a chance to toast and release their essential oils.

Whole spices impart their flavor more slowly and are best for long-simmered recipes like stews and soups. For easy removal, tie them in a piece of cheesecloth before dropping them into the pot.

Tempering your whole spices — toasting or sautéing them before stirring them into a steaming pot of deliciousness — releases the aromatic oils and enhances their flavor, so they'll have more impact on whatever you're cooking.

Spices never truly go bad, but when their aromas begin to fade, you'll want to replace them. Whole spices have an average shelf life of two to four years, and you can expect your ground spices to stay usable for two to three years.

Some recipes call for whole *and* ground spices, which will add layers of flavor to the dish. But there aren't any hard-and-fast rules: If you prefer the more subtle flavor of whole spices in a stew, there's no reason you shouldn't use them. (Find our tips for sourcing high-quality spices: ELmag.com/spices.)

Aromatic Herbs

HERBS: FRESH VERSUS DRIED

CURRY LEAF

A crucial component of dal and many other dishes, curry leaves are a fresh herb picked from curry trees. They're entirely different from curry powder, which is a ground blend of herbs and spices that varies by region. Both items can be used to make a curry, which is a blanket term for any number of spicy, saucy dishes in Southeast Asian cuisine.

While curry powder is used to flavor a whole dish, curry leaves are more of a background note. Their herbal, citrusy flavor becomes slightly nutty after cooking.

There's not much that can't be improved with a few curry leaves. Try them in *tadka*, a mix of herbs and spices that's tempered in oil and used as a finishing touch on top of various Indian dishes. Stir curry leaves into homemade pickles, rice, or — of course — curries. Or sprinkle crushed, dried leaves over roasted vegetables or grain bowls.

Curry leaves, like so many of the other herbs and spices described here, are rich in antioxidants. A 2020 study looking at pharmaceutical qualities of curry-leaf extracts suggests they may have anticancer properties, among other benefits.

Fresh herbs are a treat, but dried herbs, with their longer shelf life, are easier for many home cooks to keep on hand. Dried herbs last one to three years; if they've lost their aroma, it's time to replace them.

When dried, some herbs mellow out to the point that there's not much flavor left. Tender herbs like basil, parsley, and dill, for instance, are better used fresh. Lightly bruising them before adding them to a dish will help release their aromatic compounds.

Some dried herbs deliver more concentrated flavor than their fresh counterparts. Typically, you can substitute one teaspoon of dried herbs for one tablespoon of fresh, but when in doubt, let your taste buds be your guide.

MARJORAM

This Mediterranean herb tastes of citrus and pine. Fresh marjoram leaves elevate meat dishes, tomato sauces, roasted vegetables, and salad dressings.

Dried marjoram has a bolder flavor, which blends seamlessly into a simmering pot of soup or stew. It traditionally makes up part of the blend *herbes de Provence*, and it often appears in recipes for Thanksgiving stuffing or roasted chicken.

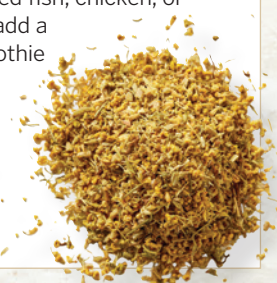
Long used in traditional medicine, marjoram delivers antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and antimicrobial benefits. It may also aid in menstrual-cycle regulation, especially when consumed as a tea.

FENNEL POLLEN

Native to the Mediterranean, fennel tastes of licorice. Fennel pollen, hand-harvested from the flowers of the fennel plant, has the same distinct flavor but with a zesty citrus note and elegant sweetness.

The spice tastes like the first glorious warm days of summer and has been dubbed “the spice of the angels.”

Fennel pollen is ideal for finishing sweet or savory dishes. Sprinkle a bit over roasted fish, chicken, or vegetables, or add a pinch to a smoothie bowl. If you're lucky enough to have wild fennel growing nearby, it's easy to forage.



DILL

Grassy and citrusy, with anise-like notes, dill pairs well with tangy dairy: Sour cream, yogurt, and cream cheese are great bases for dill spreads and sauces.

The herb has Mediterranean origins, but it also makes appearances in Polish, Bulgarian, and Swedish cuisine.

Garnish salads, soups, and roasted vegetables with chopped dill, or use it to flavor fish or poached eggs. Mix it into yogurt for a quick dressing, or blend it into marinades to give them a bright, herby lift. 🌿

LEMONGRASS

Lemongrass is wonderfully complex: lemony, herbaceous, floral, and spicy. Prevalent in Thai, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian, Malaysian, and Indonesian recipes, it elevates dishes with its characteristic brightness.

The zesty, herbal flavors of fresh lemongrass make a stellar addition to stir-fries, marinades, dressings, and sauces. Dried lemongrass has more of a woody flavor, so it's perfect for swirling into soups, curries, or anything simmered over gentle heat.

Dried or fresh, it can be brewed into a tea that offers various health benefits, such as lowering cholesterol, reducing inflammation, and helping to prevent tooth decay.

CAMILLE BERRY

is a wine and food writer based in San Francisco.



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Soup's On

Make easy, comforting, delicious meals with a few of our favorite soup recipes.

BY **KAELYN RILEY**

Soup season may be my favorite time of year. A one-pot meal full of fresh veggies, simmering away on the stovetop, plus the promise of leftovers? It's just about the coziest thing I can imagine. And if you live in a place with chilly November evenings, cozy is a dinnertime priority.

That's why we've reached back into the *Experience Life* archives to offer you a selection of our favorite soups from our more than 20 years of publishing. If you're looking for a meal that'll warm you up (and not stress you out), look no further: One of these simple, wholesome recipes is sure to fit the bill.



Italian Wedding Soup With Chicken Meatballs and Parsley

Makes six to eight servings
Prep time: 45 to 70 minutes

FOR THE SOUP BASE:

- 1 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 8 cups chicken stock
- 1 bunch broccoli rabe, coarsely chopped (about 4 cups)
- 1½ cups chopped fresh parsley
- 1 15-oz. can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Parmesan cheese, to garnish

FOR THE MEATBALLS:

- ½ lb. ground chicken
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup whole-grain breadcrumbs
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley
- ½ tsp. sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Heat a large soup pot over medium heat, then add the olive oil. Add the onion, carrots, celery, and garlic, and sauté until al dente. Add the chicken stock and simmer until the vegetables are tender.

While the stock is simmering, make the meatballs by mixing the ground chicken with the egg, breadcrumbs, cheese, and parsley, and season with salt and pepper.

Shape into small balls with a teaspoon or a small scoop and arrange on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes, until the meatballs are cooked through. Add to the simmering soup.

Add the broccoli rabe, parsley, and cannellini beans, and simmer five minutes to heat through. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve with a fresh grating of Parmesan cheese.

— BETSY NELSON



Egg Drop Soup

Makes four servings
Prep time: 30 to 45 minutes

- 6 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 tbs. mirin (rice wine)
- 1 tbs. minced fresh ginger
- 1 carrot, sliced thinly
- 8 snow peas, sliced thinly
- 1 cup shredded napa cabbage
- 1 cup shredded cooked chicken breast or 1 cup thinly sliced shiitake mushrooms
- 2 tbs. potato starch or cornstarch (optional)
- 1 tbs. tamari or soy sauce
- 1 tsp. toasted sesame oil
- 3 large eggs, well beaten
- 2 scallions, finely chopped, or ½ cup chopped watercress

Bring the broth to a simmer with the mirin and ginger.

Add the carrot, snow peas, cabbage, and chicken or mushrooms, and simmer until vegetables are just cooked.

If using the potato starch or cornstarch, mix it with ¼ cup cold water and stir into the simmering soup. Simmer until slightly thickened.

Add the tamari and sesame oil and then stir in the eggs. The egg will cook into thin “ribbons.”

Cook for one to two minutes more and then serve topped with chopped scallions or watercress.

— BN



Cozy Lentil Soup With Delicata Squash

Makes six servings

Prep time: 50 to 70 minutes

- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- ½ tsp. sea salt, plus more to taste
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 1 medium delicata or butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into ½-in. cubes
- 1 tsp. curry powder
- ½ tsp. ground cumin
- ½ tsp. ground turmeric
- ¼ tsp. ground coriander
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
- Pinch red-pepper flakes
- 1 cup green lentils, rinsed well
- 8 cups organic vegetable broth
- 1 cup stemmed and thinly sliced kale, tightly packed

Heat a Dutch oven or heavy soup pot over medium heat, then add the olive oil. Add the onion and a pinch of salt and sauté until the onion is translucent, about four minutes. Add the carrots, celery, squash, and another pinch of salt, and sauté until all of the vegetables are just tender, about five minutes.

Add the curry powder, cumin, turmeric, coriander, cinnamon, ¼ teaspoon salt, and red-pepper flakes, and stir. Add the lentils and stir to coat. Pour in ½ cup of the broth, stirring to loosen any bits stuck to the pot, and cook until the liquid is reduced by half.

Add the rest of the broth. Increase the heat to high and bring to a boil. Decrease the heat to low, cover, and simmer until the lentils are tender, about 20 to 25 minutes. You may want to add a pinch more salt to taste. Stir in the kale and cook until it's tender, about three minutes, and serve.

— REBECCA KATZ



Pear Parsnip Soup

Makes eight servings

Prep time: 50 to 75 minutes

- Extra-virgin olive oil, for the pot
- 2 cups chopped yellow onions (about 2 large onions)
- 9 cups chopped, peeled parsnips (about 4½ lb.)
- 4 cups chopped, peeled pears (about 6 medium pears)
- 2 cups chopped, peeled Yukon gold potatoes (about ½ lb.)
- 1 tsp. sea salt, plus more to taste
- 8 to 9 cups vegetable broth
- 1 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- 2 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
- ½ tsp. white pepper, plus more to taste

Heat a medium soup pot over medium-high heat, then add enough olive oil to cover the bottom of the pot.

Add the onions, parsnips, pears, potatoes, and sea salt. Cook until the onions have softened, about two minutes. Add the broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until parsnips and potatoes are soft, 15 to 20 minutes. Stir in the nutmeg and thyme.

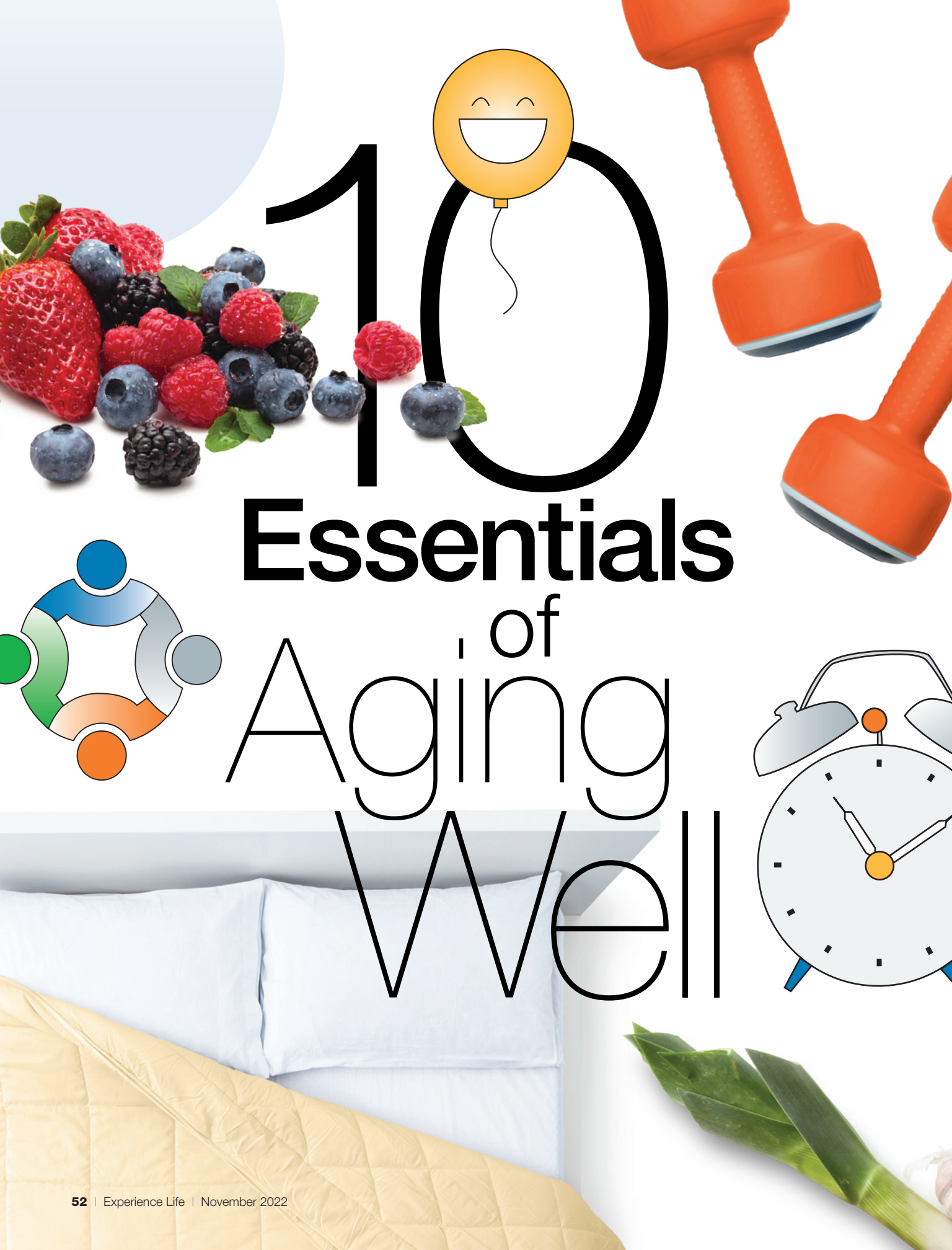
Carefully ladle the soup into a blender and blend until smooth. Strain the soup through a fine-mesh strainer or a colander lined with cheesecloth to remove any pulp. Return the strained soup to the pot and heat until hot. Season with the white pepper and add salt to taste. 🍴

— CARY NEFF



CLEAR THE CRISPER

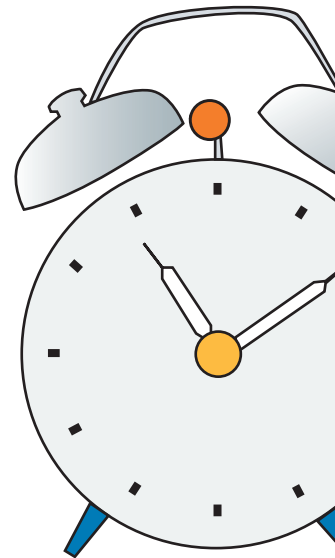
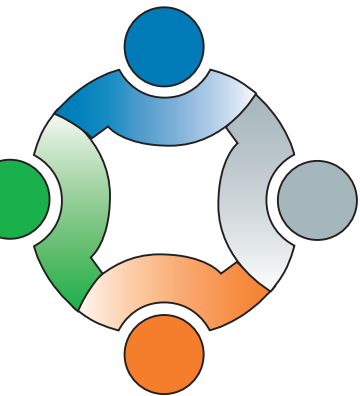
Use up your leftover veggies in Laurie David's Sunday Soup at ELmag.com/sundaysoup.



10

Essentials

of
Aging
Well





SIMPLE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE HOW WE AGE.

BY FRANK LIPMAN, MD, AND DANIELLE CLARO

We all start aging the minute we're born, but in our 40s and 50s, it's a new game. Our bodies begin naturally shifting into a mode with a focus on maintenance rather than production and growth. Hormones reshuffle, and cellular function is generally less efficient.

Some of us worry that we're destined to age in a certain way because of how our relatives did. Nope. The idea of "bad genes" creating our destiny is grossly exaggerated.

Sure, we can look at our family and gather useful information, but this is only the beginning of the story. Lifestyle choices have tremendous impact. How we age is, in many ways, up to us — and it's never too late to start aging well.

Don't despair or get stuck on choices you wish you'd made sooner. Improvements today make a difference at any point in your health journey.

We've written about the fundamentals of healthy aging in our book *The New Rules of Aging Well*. Here, we give some of the essentials — the powerful changes you can make today to strengthen immunity, increase energy, and age better immediately.



JUST EAT LESS.

After about age 45, your body doesn't need as many calories as it once did. It's not building anymore; it's protecting and preserving, and this requires less fuel.

A recent study showed that subjects who reduced their caloric intake by 30 percent lived longer and even avoided some age-related diseases. This research didn't take into account what the subjects were eating, only the amount. This single change — eating less now and cutting back a little more every five years or so — can have a serious impact.

Consuming less food is easier on your system. Less food means less for your body to process. It lightens the workload, and that translates to better overall function. (While this approach applies broadly, endurance athletes and others who burn calories at high levels might need to consume more.)

We get that this is a big ask. Time around the table with family and friends is precious and also an important part of aging well — community, love, sharing, connection. Just be smart about what's on that table. And start with the simple idea of eating until you're only 80 percent full. It's the difference between satisfying your hunger and feeling the need to unbutton your pants.

LIFESTYLE CHOICES HAVE TREMENDOUS IMPACT. HOW WE AGE IS, IN MANY WAYS, UP TO US — AND IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO START AGING WELL.



2

TRY 16-HOUR OVERNIGHT FASTING.

One easy way to eat less overall is to practice fasting for 16 hours a couple of times a week. These short fasts benefit you in a few ways:

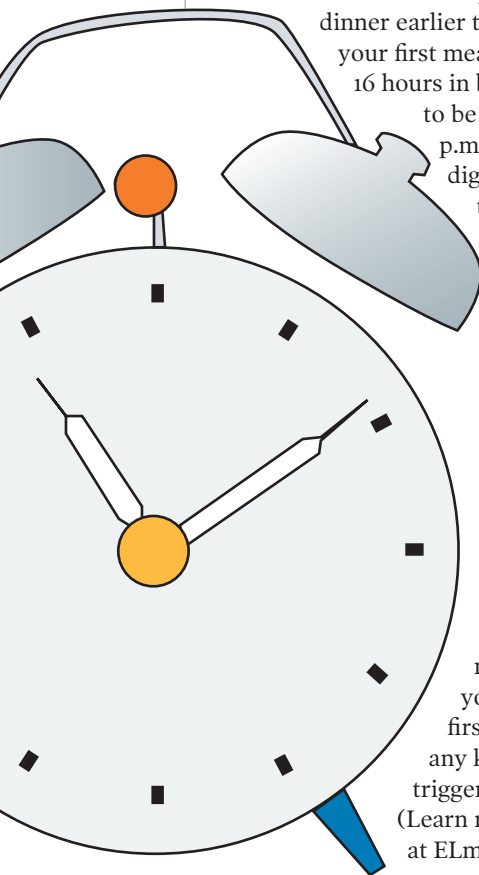
- When you don't eat for an extended period, you naturally eat less overall.
- Your digestive system works better when it has a chance to rest and recover, and your body can repair itself better when it isn't constantly diverting energy to digestion.
- Fasting helps regulate several crucial hormones — including insulin and growth hormone — that impact aging and weight.
- Fasting is one of the hermetic “small stresses” that stimulate the longevity gene pathways.
- Fasting kicks in autophagy, the cellular cleanup process critical to strong immunity and aging well.

Here's the plan: Twice a week, eat dinner earlier than usual; the next day, have your first meal a little later, leaving a good 16 hours in between. Make it a point to be finished eating by 7 or 8 p.m.; this ensures you'll be done digesting before you lie down to sleep, which helps prevent acid reflux.

In the morning, get up and have a big glass of water. Then eat a nice nutritious meal at 11 a.m. or noon.

If 16 hours sounds like too much for you, begin with 12 hours, then move to 14, and build to 16. Once your body adjusts, you won't wake up craving food.

As for drinking your usual cup of coffee or tea, the jury is still out on whether it marks the end of your fast. If you do crave a caffeinated drink first thing, just take it straight; any kind of milk or sweetener will trigger the body to produce insulin. (Learn more about fasting and health at ELmag.com/intermittentfasting.)



3

TAKE CARE OF YOUR GUT HEALTH.

At least 70 percent of the immune system is located in the gut. As you age, it's critical to cultivate a healthy gut microbiome full of many different strains of good bacteria and low on bad ones.

When the microbiome is not healthy and balanced, your gut wall loosens, leaving tiny spaces where bacteria, toxins, and partially digested food can leak into the bloodstream, creating leaky gut syndrome.

These particles can spark inflammation almost anywhere in the body, leading to joint pain, skin rashes, moodiness, anxiety, depression, brain fog, or hormonal issues. This can weaken immunity and exacerbate autoimmune problems. Many of the issues we chalk up to aging could be the result of an imbalanced microbiome — which, fortunately, we can do something about.

The short version: Eat fresh, organic, unprocessed food, and avoid antibiotic- and hormone-riddled animal products. Feed your body prebiotics (garlic, onions, leeks, asparagus) and probiotics (fermented foods) every day. Take probiotic supplements.

Sleep, hydrate, and meditate; use antibiotics only when you absolutely need them; and don't take antacids for long periods — this can diminish the effectiveness of your digestion.

In other words, many of the lifestyle habits that promote general wellness are also key for gut health and immunity as you age.

FEED YOUR BODY
PREBIOTICS
EVERY DAY.



4.

GET SERIOUS ABOUT CUTTING SUGAR.

If you make only one change, let it be cutting refined sugar from your diet. Sugar is extra harmful as we age. It weakens the immune system and feeds diseases we all fear: type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's, to name a few.

In combination with certain proteins, sugar creates deposits that enter the bloodstream. They become lodged in various areas and sit like rust on your organs; this is what we call oxidative stress. These deposits damage cell membranes and can bore tiny holes in the walls of blood vessels.

Sugar is hiding in a lot of processed foods, but start with eliminating the obvious stuff: cereal, cookies, candy, and soda.

When you need something sweet, enjoy some berries or a green apple. Unlike refined sweets, fruit contains fiber that slows the absorption of sugar somewhat, minimizing the sudden rush and subsequent plummet of your blood sugar.

If you're sugar dependent and struggling to cut back, the supplement glutamine could be helpful. It basically tricks the brain into thinking it's getting glucose. Try taking it during your first weeks tapering off sugar. (Find out more about glutamine at ELmag.com/glutamine.)

IF YOU MAKE ONLY ONE CHANGE, LET IT BE CUTTING REFINED SUGAR FROM YOUR DIET.



5.

SLEEP MORE AND SLEEP BETTER.

Most people do best with seven to nine hours of sleep. (Yes, nine.) High-quality sleep is a critical piece of the puzzle as you age. Much of what people think of as signs of aging are just signs that the body needs more — and better — rest.

Learn to set yourself up for a good night's rest. This is not just about winding down in the evening; it's also about daytime habits. Meditating in the mornings has a positive impact, as does daytime cardio exercise; both make it easier to fall asleep at night. Step outside into the sunshine first thing in the morning to keep your circadian rhythms in sync with nature.

It's important to get enough REM sleep, which involves dreaming, as well as deep sleep, a type of non-REM sleep that involves little brain activity. This is when recovery happens, and when the brain's glymphatic system kicks in to clear proteins and other toxins.

If you sleep poorly and miss out on deep sleep, this cleansing system is not able to do its job. Then toxins build up in the brain, leaving you foggy and off-kilter. (Learn more about sleep and the brain at ELmag.com/circadian.)

If falling or staying asleep has become a challenge, don't give up. Yes, there are times when hormones will interfere with your ability to fall or stay asleep. But before you throw your hands up, try these changes:

- Don't drink caffeine past 2 p.m.
- Skip the wine at dinner and avoid bedtime snacks.
- Keep your bedroom dark and cool.
- If you use the TV to fall asleep, try a sound machine instead.

6

GET ACTIVE, EVERY DAY.

Exercising as you age is about more than defined workouts; it's about moving as much as you can every day, all day. It's about being a physical person. Get off the bus a couple stops early and walk. Trade the elevator for the stairs. Make your lunch break a movement break. You'll fend off stress and depression, enjoy higher-quality sleep, regularly build immune resilience, and reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

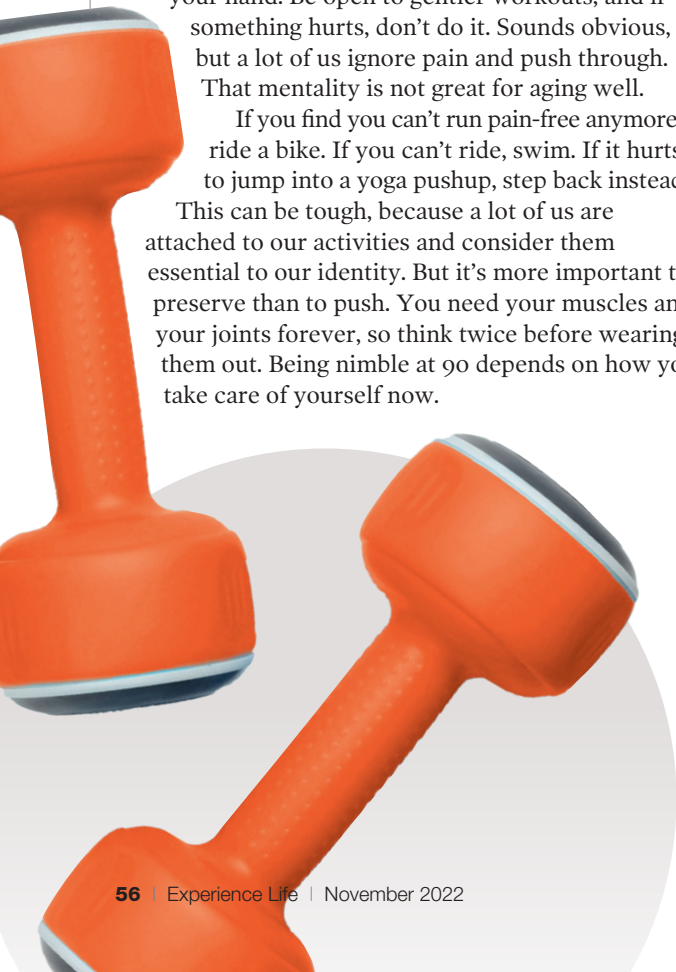
How you move also matters. As you age, place less emphasis on heavy exertion and more on frequency. As your body shifts from growing to preserving, you want to maintain strength and mobility and prevent injury. Your new mantra is "do no harm," because your capacity to heal declines over time.

When you sprain an ankle, some of the energy that goes into daily maintenance must be diverted. Your body needs to produce enzymes and anti-inflammatory nutrients to heal the ankle, and this can detract from its ability to keep up with other necessary recovery.

As for your fitness routine, the key is to adapt as your body changes — don't wait for an injury to force your hand. Be open to gentler workouts, and if something hurts, don't do it. Sounds obvious, but a lot of us ignore pain and push through. That mentality is not great for aging well.

If you find you can't run pain-free anymore, ride a bike. If you can't ride, swim. If it hurts to jump into a yoga pushup, step back instead.

This can be tough, because a lot of us are attached to our activities and consider them essential to our identity. But it's more important to preserve than to push. You need your muscles and your joints forever, so think twice before wearing them out. Being nimble at 90 depends on how you take care of yourself now.



7

MIND THE ALCOHOL.

As we age, our capacity to process alcohol decreases. You may have noticed this if you've found yourself tossing and turning in bed after a second glass of wine with dinner. You used to be fine with two glasses; now you're not. That's normal.

Alcohol can be hard on your body in a number of ways, but the fact that it interferes with sleep is especially problematic. If you're not rested, your body craves sugar and carbs for quick energy; you may find yourself too tired for exercise and then overdo the caffeine, which messes up your next night's sleep. And then it's game on: One bad night leads to another, and the cycle continues. It's easier just to skip the second glass.

That said, sharing a drink with friends or family can be nourishing in an emotional way. So, we're not saying never. Just keep it to one drink, a couple of times a week. The polyphenols in red wine don't necessarily make it good for you, but they do make it better than other forms of alcohol. And if you prefer a cocktail, choose 100 percent agave tequila or good-quality vodka with seltzer. These are both lower in simple carbohydrates.



8

HYDRATE.

For some of us, the thirst signal can fade as we age. Although the body wants water, it doesn't convey that to the mouth as clearly as it once did.

The need for fluids may express itself in other ways: loss of energy, irritability, fuzziness. Brain function can be affected by hydration, so if you can't concentrate, someone's voice is irking you, you feel unable to cope, or you have a headache — start with water.

Every day, drink at least four big glasses, ideally filtered, because the chlorine in straight tap water can attack the good bacteria in your microbiome. (Find smart filter options on page 85.)

Drinking over the course of the day is a more effective strategy for staying hydrated than standing by the sink and guzzling your daily allotment. Drink anytime, with meals or without. It all counts.

Stay away from soda and fruit juice, and no energy drinks. Tea counts toward hydration, but coffee doesn't — it's a diuretic.

If you don't love water, infuse it with a handful of mint leaves or a squeeze of citrus. Make a pitcher or fill a large jar and leave it in the fridge. (Make your own gut-supporting flavored water with the recipe at ELmag.com/goodgutwater.)





LET YOUR INTERESTS LEAD YOU, AND YOU'LL GRADUALLY FIND YOURSELF IN THE COMPANY OF KINDRED SPIRITS.

GROW YOUR FRIEND GROUP.

In certain phases of life, there's no shortage of community: We have built-in relationships at school and then at work; for parents, there's a community involved in raising kids.

But as you get older, you switch jobs, the kids go off to college, you retire. You don't necessarily have a ready-made social network anymore. You might need to make some extra effort to tend important relationships and cultivate new ones — and it's important for your health that you do.

Studies show that without social support, we age more quickly; with plenty of social engagement, the risk of dementia drops. In the Blue Zones — the places around the world where people live the longest — communal living is a common factor. (Listen to our podcast with Blue Zones founder Dan Buettner at ELmag.com/bluezonespodcast.)

Think of socializing as a wellness practice and figure out what you need to change so you can spend more time with dear friends.

Consider how good it feels to sit with a friend and talk and laugh. Why shouldn't this be the rule rather than the exception in your days? Try to make sure you get this at least once a week.

As for meeting new people, it does get trickier as we get older. Accept that making new friends takes time, and adopt a mindset of planting seeds and seeing what grows. Pay attention when you meet people you like and be open to the notion of hanging out with new people. Let your interests lead you, and you'll gradually find yourself in the company of kindred spirits.

While you may not yet be at risk of isolation, building a strong, loving social structure around you will ensure that it doesn't become an issue later. It provides a cushion for when life's challenging transitions inevitably hit. (Learn more about the health risks of loneliness at ELmag.com/loneliness.)

EMBRACE THE CHANGES THAT COME WITH AGE, NURTURE YOUR BODY AND MIND, AND SMILE MORE AT THE HUMBLING ASPECTS.



HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR ABOUT AGING.

Aging well involves cutting back on some classic pleasures: sweets, alcohol, fried foods — and complaining. If you can find a way to cultivate a positive approach and stay cheerful about changes that are beyond your control, aging is much easier.

Try to view dietary sacrifices as an opportunity to learn about what else you like. Develop an appetite for learning or nature or meditation.

Be generous with yourself in other ways, too. What is it that feels good, brings excitement, and motivates you while also doing no harm?

Is it more time with certain friends? A class you've been wanting to take? An instrument you love and want to return to or learn?

Make your life rich in small, healthy pleasures: a hot bath, a sunset walk, a weekly treatment like an infrared sauna or a massage. As you move into a way of living that really supports you, try redefining indulgence as a life filled with an array of health-affirming practices.

Those practices can include a habit of laughing freely — and laughing at yourself. Most of us take ourselves way too seriously. Embrace the changes that come with age, nurture your body and mind, and smile more at the humbling aspects. It's all a gift and, as they say, better than the alternative. ☺

FRANK LIPMAN, MD, is a leader in the field of integrative medicine. **DANIELLE CLARO** is a bestselling author and editor. This article is excerpted from their book *The New Rules of Aging Well* (Artisan Books). Copyright © 2020.



MIX IT UP



Improve your fitness and performance BY CROSS-TRAINING OUTSIDE YOUR GO-TO ACTIVITY.

BY SARAH TUFF

As he does most years, Steve Waryan is preparing to compete in the Birkebeiner, the legendary 50-kilometer Nordic ski race in far northern Wisconsin. So you might think he's skiing as much as he can. But no. He's roller skiing, cycling, running, strength training, and completing HIIT (high-intensity interval training) workouts.

And when he plays golf, he runs the hills of his local Minnesota course while carrying his clubs. "For me, it's the ultimate cross-training," he explains. "And the more cross-training I do overall, the better shape I'm in for skiing the Birkie."

Cross-training is simply doing a beneficial activity that's different from your go-to exercise. Physically, cross-training typically engages different muscle groups, helping to prevent sore joints, overtaxed muscles, and injuries that can come from focusing on only one sport or one type of training.

Psychologically, cross-training allows you to experience the highs of learning new skills and perhaps meeting new people. It also gives your brain a break from the routine of relentlessly pushing toward one particular goal.

It's as simple as that. But the benefits can be huge.

Waryan is one of many people who are reaching their athletic potential

by infusing their regular routines with cross-training that supports their primary sport and its movement modality. You might be lifting weights so you can tackle gnarlier singletrack on your mountain bike, or hitting the rowing machine as a break from laps in the pool.

"If you've gotten stuck in a rut physically or mentally, or you've stopped seeing results and feel like your successes have plateaued, then it's time to switch up your workouts and try adding something new," says Jasmine de la Cruz, AFAA, NASM, Life Time group fitness instructor and trainer.

And cross-training isn't reserved for only the most serious athletes: Anybody at any fitness level can reap benefits. "A reduced risk of injury, improved total fitness and mind-body awareness, and exposure to new methods means you can say goodbye to boredom," explains de la Cruz.

Cross-training also helps you adapt to the changing seasons. Many cyclists turn to Nordic skiing in winter, and vice versa in summer;

and almost all of us tend to retreat indoors in subzero weather or when faced with freezing rain.

How do you add cross-training to days that may already be packed with work, workouts, and life?

"There is no one-size-fits-all schedule for cross-training," says high-performance endurance coach Joe Friel, author of numerous training books. Running and strength training are often go-tos because they're familiar and offer fast results, but as Friel notes, choosing something you truly enjoy is important.

When evaluating possible cross-training activities, consider what you hope to accomplish by doing them:

- Remedy muscle imbalances?
- Improve strength?
- Increase mobility?
- Boost conditioning?
- Take a mental break?

With these goals in mind, our experts offer their favorite cross-training options for a few common activities.

If you've gotten stuck in a rut physically or mentally, or you've stopped seeing results and feel like your successes have plateaued, **then it's time to switch up your workouts and try adding something new.**



If you like running, **TRY INDOOR CYCLING.**

“Cross-training for running is an activity that does two things: It mimics running form, and it grows our cardiorespiratory abilities,” says Randy Accetta, PhD, the director of coaching education for the Road Runners Club of America.

An indoor-cycling class provides the stress-adaptation response runners need. When you’re rising from the saddle to climb an imaginary hill, for example, your body responds in much the same way it would if you were running up a real one. Your heart rate increases, and your quads, glutes, hamstrings, and core kick in to power you through the movement. But because you’re on a bike, it’s a great low-impact alternative to running.

“When the weather is bad or when the body is creaky, you can still do run-specific cross-training to get the gains made by running,” says Accetta. So, signing up for a class is a no-brainer if Mother Nature gets in the way of your daily run, or if your joints ache from pounding the pavement.

MAKE THE CROSSOVER: For runners, one or two days of cross-training with indoor cycling is best. Although many indoor cyclists ride several days a week, that’s too much for runners, who are also taxing their bodies in other ways. If you’ve been running solo, chances are you’ll get a mental and motivational boost from the instructors and fellow cyclists.

Arrive early to claim your spot and adjust your bike. As you ride, remember to keep your chest lifted and arms forward, which will help you breathe and protect your back. Upgrading to cycling shoes and padded shorts can improve form and efficiency and help reduce aches and pains. These benefits carry over to better running performance. (For an indoor cycling workout, see ELmag.com/indoorcycling.)



If you like mountain biking, **TRY LIFTING WEIGHTS.**

Longtime mountain biker Jen Parsons was living in Vermont and coping with the cold, gray winters when she began strength training using lower weights at higher intensities. The next summer, she found herself riding the state’s singletrack with more confidence than ever.

“Building upper-body strength through shoulder presses and push presses gave me the ability to ride strong through rugged downhills I used to be afraid of,” says Parsons, who now lives in Telluride, Colo., and strength-trains year round. “Deadlifts and core stability mean I know I can handle a big drop and not end up like a rag doll.”

Like any good mountain biker, she keeps her arms loose and flexible, but lifting weights has improved her body awareness so she can activate her body “in a hot second” and still stay stable.



MAKE THE CROSSOVER: Parsons recommends these five strength-training moves for mountain bikers: overhead squats, deadlifts, side planks with leg lifts, jump lunges, and one-legged pushups. They’ll give you the strength to handle corners, absorb unexpected bumps on the trail, and be better able to stay centered on the bike as you move backward and forward, side to side, and up and down. (For more on strength training, see ELmag.com/bestrong.)

If you like racquet sports, **TRY YOGA.**

Whether you play tennis, pickleball, or squash, you're likely working out harder than you think. "You're using a lot of the same muscle groups over and over — it's not a balanced physical activity. So a lot of injuries and wear and tear that happen from racquet sports are overuse and imbalance," explains tennis coach Justin Baker, founder of Mindful Power.

Racquet sports contort your body, take you to the edge of your range of motion, and then ask you to be balanced and strong at these edges, he says. "You have to build strength in a lot of surprising areas, and you have to have range of motion and stable joints. The body-care needs of a racquet-sports player are pretty significant."

Yoga answers those needs — and more — during sessions dedicated to using nearly all the muscle groups of your body in a balanced way.

The breathwork of yoga brings a further benefit for racquet-sports players. "Yoga can help you learn to breathe more effectively while the ball is in play, reducing muscle tension and leading to more efficient movement and stroke production," Baker says.



MAKE THE CROSSOVER: To reap the maximum benefits of yoga, Baker suggests, mix one yoga class into your weekly workout routine. "Once you've learned how to do yoga, then you can start integrating it in really simple ways," he says. "You can use it as part of your warm-up before you go on the court, and you can use it as a cool-down when you come off the court." (For a yoga workout, see ELmag.com/yogaworkout.)



If you like swimming, **TRY ROWING.**

Coaches and trainers for many sports often recommend swimming as a cross-training option because it's low impact. "Swimming is one of those all-around body exercises that just enhances your overall aerobic capacity," says Ellen Johnston, head coach of the Water Rat swim team in Westport, Conn. "It also helps to relieve some of the pounding that you might get from running — on your legs, your knees — and even from biking."

But what if your primary focus is swimming? When you need a break from the pool, sliding onto a rowing machine is a natural shift into cross-training. "Machine rowing is an all-around aerobic activity that helps strengthen the core, back, legs, and shoulders," says Johnston.

Like swimming, rowing is good for people of all fitness levels, and it's an efficient, low-impact calorie burner that uses all the major muscle groups. Plus, because rowing machines can measure distance in meters, the workout brings a layer of familiarity to swimmers accustomed to counting laps and distance.

MAKE THE CROSSOVER: Many pools offer rowing machines right on the deck so swimmers can mix up their workouts or exercise while waiting for a lane. Otherwise, chances are there's one, or several, in another part of your health club or fitness center.

It's worth spending some time learning proper technique. Initiate the stroke with your legs, not your arms, for instance, and keep your wrists flat and relaxed. Avoid lifting with your back and bending your knees too early. Two days a week for 20 to 30 minutes works well for cross-training, says Johnston. (For more on rowing form, see ELmag.com/rowing.)





If you like yoga, **TRY ROCK CLIMBING.**

Going from a downward-facing dog to an upward climb is one of the best ways to keep your body limber when you're ready to look at something other than a mat or a mirror in the yoga studio.

"Rock climbing complements yoga, as it heightens your senses for using spatial awareness as well as your center of gravity," says personal trainer Ben Walker. "This improves your motor senses and enhances your coordination when doing a yoga flow."

"Climbing also improves how you functionally use your entire body. As all the necessary movements are different, it requires balance and strength from all body parts assisting each other. This boosts transitioning through different movement patterns when performing yoga."

MAKE THE CROSSOVER: If you're climbing for the first time, chances are you'll rely on your upper-body strength to reach handholds and ascend walls, indoors or out. But the most efficient and body-friendly technique is to rely more on the larger muscles of the legs.

Plus, Walker says, "core strength and strong hip flexors are also essential for controlling how you mobilize the upper body in different directions." (For more on climbing, see ELmag.com/rockclimbing.)



If you like lifting weights, **TRY HIKING.**



When Tyler Barnes isn't coaching weightlifting classes in Vermont, he's hiking the Green Mountains — and not just for the picturesque vistas. Hiking naturally works the core muscles required for strength-training moves such as the squat, lunge, and clean-and-press.

In fact, almost every movement in hiking mimics gym work: You're bending over to pick up your pack like a deadlift; you're hoisting it onto your shoulders like a clean; you're squatting to admire a wildflower or tie your hiking boots; and you're lunging over rocks and roots.

Hiking also offers the steady cardiovascular training you may miss while hoisting heavy weights. "Because hiking is more aerobic than lifting, you'll have a higher respiratory rate. You'll need to learn to keep the spine braced while your heart rate is elevated," Barnes says. "At the end of the day, you're not going to go wrong by introducing some regular metabolic conditioning to your exercise routine, provided that you do it consistently, and that you're intentional with how you're implementing it."

MAKE THE CROSSOVER:

Hiking requires a steadier breathing rhythm than weightlifting. Barnes suggests you find a rhythm that allows you to focus less on your pace and more on keeping your spine braced and your chest open and upright. "This will also give you the opportunity to take in your surroundings and enjoy the activity rather than being too focused on a metric like output," he says. (For more on hiking, see ELmag.com/hiking.)

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



WHAT HAPPENED

When I Stepped Into Cross-Training

AS A LIFELONG RUNNER, I live and breathe my sport. Rolling out of bed and lacing up my shoes is as habitual as brushing my teeth. And I've also been lucky enough to avoid the typical injuries that plague runners, as well as recover from a broken leg the doctors said would put an end to my running. So, I saw no reason to cross-train.

But when I stumbled upon group weightlifting classes at my gym, I was hooked. The encouragement — and laughs — from my fellow participants kept me going week after week.

"The gym is the ideal place to discover which activities will be your next cross-training obsession," says Life Time trainer Jasmine de la Cruz, AFAA, NASM. Many health clubs feature not only elliptical trainers, treadmills, rowing machines, and free weights, but also lap pools, rock-climbing walls, basketball courts, tennis and pickleball courts, and a slew of group fitness classes.

I'll never forget the feeling of those group fitness classes at my gym: My brain was buzzing as much as my body while I showered afterward, thinking of the heavier weights I'd lifted and the witty exchanges I'd had with my new friends.

After a few months, I was running faster than ever, thanks to the core strength and upper-body

stability I'd developed in class, as well as leg muscles that were more limber from end-of-class stretching. When I moved from Vermont to Colorado, I instantly found like-minded people in group strength training, and it became nearly as habitual as my running.

When COVID-19 hit, I felt just like so many fitness enthusiasts: I was adrift without the energy from my instructor and classmates. I was, however, able to follow the routines through an online app, which led me to a life-changing discovery: dancing.

There was a series of prerecorded videos focused on movement and music, and I became a devotee, learning the steps and then laughing along with the instructors' comments. Suddenly, Snoop Dogg, Salt-N-Pepa, the Ying Yang Twins, and Pitbull were back in my repertoire, as were new pop songs, contemporary ballads, and timeless jazz tunes.

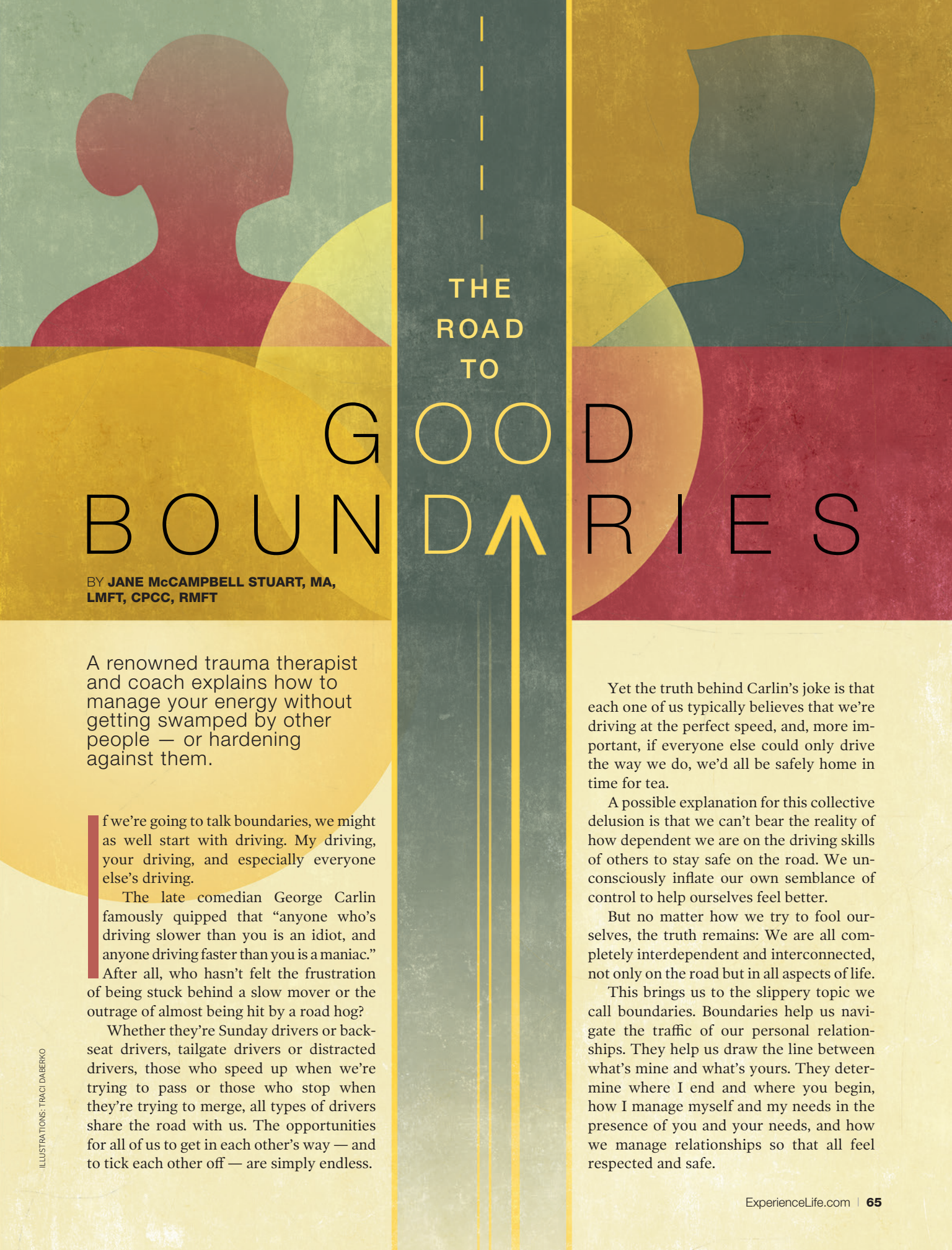
My mind crackled with energy and my body flooded with euphoria as I learned to move in new, powerful, empowering ways. Dancing helped me heal from divorce, and dancing made me a more balanced, confident, and graceful runner. I suddenly found new joy, fulfillment, and purpose.



The gym is the ideal place to discover which activities will be your next cross-training obsession."

— ST





THE
ROAD
TO

G O O D
B O U N D A R I E S

BY JANE McCAMPBELL STUART, MA,
LMFT, CPCC, RMFT

A renowned trauma therapist and coach explains how to manage your energy without getting swamped by other people — or hardening against them.

If we're going to talk boundaries, we might as well start with driving. My driving, your driving, and especially everyone else's driving.

The late comedian George Carlin famously quipped that “anyone who’s driving slower than you is an idiot, and anyone driving faster than you is a maniac.”

After all, who hasn’t felt the frustration of being stuck behind a slow mover or the outrage of almost being hit by a road hog?

Whether they’re Sunday drivers or back-seat drivers, tailgate drivers or distracted drivers, those who speed up when we’re trying to pass or those who stop when they’re trying to merge, all types of drivers share the road with us. The opportunities for all of us to get in each other’s way — and to tick each other off — are simply endless.

Yet the truth behind Carlin’s joke is that each one of us typically believes that we’re driving at the perfect speed, and, more important, if everyone else could only drive the way we do, we’d all be safely home in time for tea.

A possible explanation for this collective delusion is that we can’t bear the reality of how dependent we are on the driving skills of others to stay safe on the road. We unconsciously inflate our own semblance of control to help ourselves feel better.

But no matter how we try to fool ourselves, the truth remains: We are all completely interdependent and interconnected, not only on the road but in all aspects of life.

This brings us to the slippery topic we call boundaries. Boundaries help us navigate the traffic of our personal relationships. They help us draw the line between what’s mine and what’s yours. They determine where I end and where you begin, how I manage myself and my needs in the presence of you and your needs, and how we manage relationships so that all feel respected and safe.

THE THREE TYPES OF PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

We learn about personal boundaries in our families of origin, so it makes sense that it was a family therapist who first drew them on paper. When Salvador Minuchin met with families, he would watch for clues about how they operated: who sat next to whom, who responded to questions, who interrupted, who took up more emotional space than others, and who would shrink to keep the peace.

Armed with his observations, Minuchin would then draw a family map depicting the three types of boundaries he saw at work: the *clear* boundary, the *diffuse* boundary, and the *rigid* boundary. To understand how they function, we need to get back on the road.

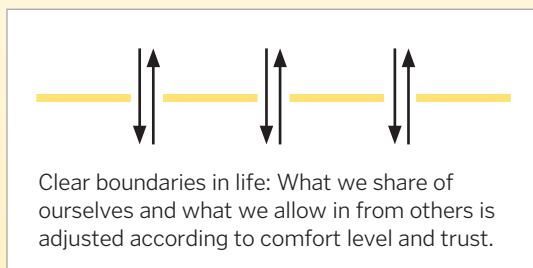
Here's the key:
As adults, we can adjust how much we give of ourselves and how much of others we absorb, even if they are not operating with clear boundaries.

CLEAR BOUNDARIES



Clear personal boundaries look a bit like lane dividers on the highway — long, thin stripes with gaps between them. The stripes help us stay in our lane, while the gaps tell us that we may change lanes if we choose. If we do switch lanes, we have a responsibility to other drivers to make sure that we don't run into them, or force them to brake or swerve to avoid us.

Observing clear boundaries on the road means remaining in our lane, adjusting our speed to go with the flow of traffic, checking our mirrors and blind spots, and clearly signaling our intentions (that'd be our blinkers, people) before changing lanes so that nobody is taken by surprise.



When we maintain clear personal boundaries, the long stripes distinguish where we end and where others begin. The gaps allow us to relate — sharing parts of ourselves with others and receiving what others choose to share with us. There is clarity about what belongs to whom, so we can hold on to the essence of who we are — with all of our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, stories, and value systems — while still allowing others to be close to us if we choose.

Clear boundaries free up cognitive and emotional energy. They also allow us to be welcoming and curious toward others, including those who may be different from us or who do things differently than we do.

During conflict, clear boundaries enable us to acknowledge the importance of the relationship, take responsibility for any harm done (whether intentional or inadvertent), and invite conversation about how to meet everyone's needs moving forward.

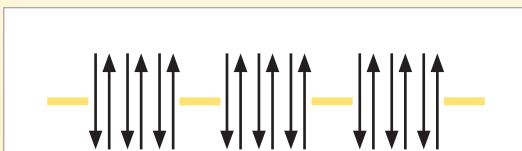
Here's the key: As adults, we can adjust how much we give of ourselves and how much of others we absorb, even if they are not operating with clear boundaries. For example, if we know someone can't keep a secret, we stick to public topics. If someone loves to chat and we're short on time, we don't tempt them with open-ended questions. If we're interacting with someone who tends to emote in big ways, we can be kind without trying to comfort, offering them the chance to feel their competence.

DIFFUSE BOUNDARIES



Think of a time you were driving along, minding your own business, when the lane markers suddenly jogged sharply, disappeared, or were replaced by disparately placed cones. That's what a diffuse boundary looks like.

We may intend to stay in our lane, but it's hard to see where the lines are, and we can inadvertently merge into someone else's lane or find them veering into ours. Roads without predictable lane dividers are trickier to navigate: Everyone must be on high alert and ready to adjust, which is chaotic and exhausting for all involved.



Diffuse boundaries in life: The exchange of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and value systems — as well as physical or sexual touch — is so overwhelming that it's hard to know what's ours and what belongs to others.

Diffuse boundaries in life look a lot like diffuse boundaries on the road: It's unclear who has the right of way, and at least one person must constantly anticipate and adjust to whatever the other might decide to do. Such relationships may be described as “enmeshed,” “engulfed,” “fused,” or “merged.”

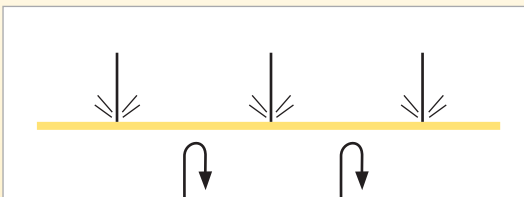
If we operate with diffuse boundaries, we may struggle to maintain our own feelings and point of view in the presence of other people. Their anxiety causes us to feel anxious, or their anger makes us feel small and afraid. Meanwhile, a kind and comfortable person causes us to feel a sense of secure well-being.

We may mistake this sensitivity to others as “empathing,” but being caught in an endless cycle of reaction to other people's thoughts and feelings is more likely the hallmark of a diffuse boundary. A healthy empath can read a person or a room without needing to respond in any way.

RIGID BOUNDARIES



On the road, solid, continuous lines mean Do Not Cross. These are deployed when it's too dangerous to switch lanes, such as in a narrow tunnel, or on two-lane roads where oncoming traffic isn't visible. The Do Not Cross line means you need to stay in your lane, because a collision would have serious implications.



Rigid boundaries in life: We are in close proximity to the other person, but any attempts at relationship get rebuffed.

The rigid boundary is the opposite of the diffuse boundary, and it's the rigid boundaries in life that give the whole concept a bad name. When we exclaim, “I'm drawing a boundary!” we rarely mean “Our relationship matters to me, and I'd like to discuss how we could do it better.”

Instead, we mean something closer to “I'm cutting you off, because I'm too conflict-avoidant to ask if we could do this differently.” Such abrupt disengagements can be confusing, even traumatizing, especially if they awaken old wounds.

What's more, the person being ostracized often has no idea the other was unhappy.

The only time a rigid boundary is called for is when repeated requests for a clear boundary have been ignored, or when the line-crossing is so egregious that it causes significant harm, such as in the case of threatened or actual physical or sexual violence. Otherwise, it's more appropriate to begin the work of creating healthier boundaries.

THE CHILDHOOD ROAD TRIP

If no one modeled clear boundaries for us when we were children, we may have no idea that they're even an option. As adults, we might find ourselves bouncing between the diffuse boundary, where we feel routinely overwhelmed by other people's needs, and the rigid boundary, where we meet our own needs at any cost, including at the expense of others.

This makes sense if you think of growing up in a family with diffuse boundaries as an endless road trip. We're strapped in the back seat between the poking of one sibling and the whining of another, hearing the fight between our parents in the front. Add to that the driver's refusal to stop for a bathroom break, and we have absolutely no control over our well-being or our destination.

Naturally, when we get our license as a teenager, we feel entitled to crank up the music and drive wherever and however we like, without a second thought for anyone else on the road or who else might need the car.

But we don't need to drive like our teenage self to have some control over our well-being.

A mismatch between our words and energy requires others to decode our statements, which can create confusion and anxiety.

A ROAD MAP TO BETTER BOUNDARIES

The following strategies can make strong, clear boundaries much easier for us to find, even if no one ever showed us the way.

1. MATCH YOUR WORDS WITH YOUR ENERGY.

A little-known fact about boundaries is that they have less to do with what we say and more to do with how we say it. Ideally, our words and our energy match, creating congruence. If our boundaries are diffuse or rigid, congruence is unlikely.

This is best illustrated by the sentence "I'm fine." How we say this can mean anything from "I'm doing well, thanks for asking" to "I'm actually not fine, and maybe we could talk about it later" or even "I'm *not* fine, I'm furious, and it's all your fault!"

A mismatch between our words and energy requires others to decode our statements, which can create confusion and anxiety. It also indicates that we're operating from a diffuse boundary.

Alternatively, if we slam out of the house and turn off our phone, we've just created a rigid boundary, cutting off the relationship altogether.

If we're not fine, and especially if we're angry or hurt, and we would like to operate from a clear boundary, the best move is to own it and ask for some time. This could sound like, "Thanks for asking how I am. I'm not OK, but I need a bit of time alone before I can talk about it." This congruent way of communicating honors us and the relationship.

2. OFFER TRUTH, GOOD WISHES, AND NO EXCUSES.

People know when we're lying, fudging, avoiding, or agreeing resentfully. Thanks to the energy accompanying our words, it just *feels icky*. So, what to do when we need space for ourselves, but we still want to protect the other's feelings? How do we communicate from a clear boundary?

One useful formula is Truth, Good Wishes, and No Excuses. Start by being honest, and avoid any kind of excuse. Saying, "I can't come because my sister will be here" not only invites negotiation ("Bring her along!") but also creates the potential for judgment or hurt feelings about your priorities ("You could see your sister anytime").

Skipping the excuses avoids both of those detours.

Conclude by offering goodwill to care for the connection.

These are some examples of clear-boundary responses that follow this formula. Notice how they create space and honor the relationship at the same time:

Declining invitations: "I won't be making it, but I hope you have a lovely time."

No second date: "It's not a fit for me, but I wish you all the best."

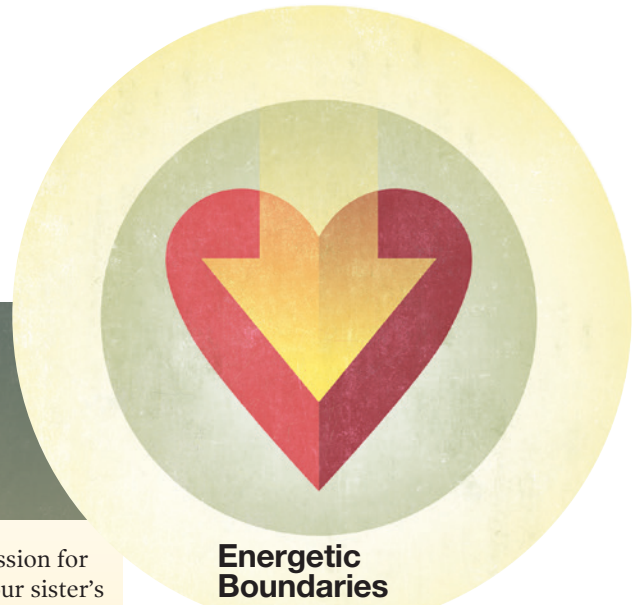
When a meeting runs long: "I have a hard stop at 5, but I'd love to chat another time."

Saying no to a request for a favor: "That's not going to work for me, but I hope you find a solution!"

Deflecting an intrusive inquiry: "I really appreciate your concern. It's so kind of you to ask." Full stop.

3.

TAKE UP YOUR SPACE, YOUR WHOLE SPACE, AND NOTHING BUT YOUR SPACE.



Energetic Boundaries

Our heartbeat generates an electromagnetic field that can be detected up to three feet away from our bodies on all sides, surrounding us in a sphere of energy — what could be described as an “energetic boundary.” This may be what we pick up on when we enter a room and can feel that a fight just happened, or someone is in shock, or something just isn’t right.

According to the research organization HeartMath, stressful emotions such as anger, frustration, and anxiety create an erratic, herky-jerky heart rhythm that is broadcast in this energetic field, putting everyone in our immediate sphere on edge.

Conversely, emotions such as compassion, appreciation, and love create a smooth, wavelike rhythm that invites everyone into a calmer, gentler state of being.

Breathwork, meditation, yoga, and the use of biofeedback devices can help us become more aware, not only of the rhythm of our heart but also of this energetic space we take up — our energetic boundary. When we learn to bring our heart into coherence, it helps us manage what enters our energetic space, as well as what we broadcast to others. (Learn more at heartmath.org.)

When we talk about people with “bad” boundaries, we usually mean those who take up too much space: talking incessantly, standing too close, emoting too dramatically, and eating more than their fair share of the pie. Someone who parks a noisy, gas-guzzling truck across two parking spots or drags an oversize roller bag onto the plane.

Yet while the “too-much-spacers” do impinge upon the rights and needs of others, they also take care of their own needs, and they’re genuinely baffled by those who don’t.

It’s important to recognize that those of us who don’t take up our space or care for our needs create just as much of a burden on a relationship as the gas-guzzlers. Whether we call our diffuse boundaries self-sacrifice, martyrdom, or codependence, our burnout and resentment also land on everyone else’s shoulders.

For example, heroic, “selfless” acts can almost never be repaid. We might think we’re helping when we offer a kidney to a distant relative even if

it will put us out of commission for weeks, or when we allow our sister’s family to stay rent-free in our home for a year while we sleep on the couch. Such grand gestures can create a chasm of indebtedness that makes it almost impossible to maintain a balanced relationship.

If we want to do something truly relational, we must first make sure we can give our time, energy, or service freely, without strings or expectations. Then we honor the other person’s boundary by asking their permission before we help. Finally, we give them the dignity of returning the favor — or at least paying it forward.

“Your playing small doesn’t serve the world,” writes author and spiritual teacher Marianne Williamson.

Indeed, one of the greatest acts of love — which is also the greatest demonstration of clear boundaries — is taking up our space, caring for ourselves, and meeting our own needs, thus freeing up everyone in our lives to do the same.

If we’re going to *improve* our boundaries, we might as well start with driving: my driving, your driving, and especially everyone else’s driving. After all, who doesn’t appreciate a wave of thanks for letting someone into our lane, or some humor when we’re waiting on each other at the stop sign?

The opportunities to extend grace and space to ourselves and our fellow travelers — whether anxious drivers or running-late drivers, professional drivers or vacation drivers — are simply endless. And the truth behind Carlin’s joke remains: There will always be those driving faster and those driving slower, yet all of us deserve to make it safely home in time for tea. ☺

JANE McCAMPBELL STUART, MA, LMFT, CPCC, RMFT, is a licensed therapist and certified coach. She specializes in the healing of trauma and PTSD. Find her at therapyjane.com.

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Real Life



The climate crisis looms over us all, causing a unique form of anxiety and evoking difficult emotions, such as grief and guilt, denial and despair.

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Move beyond emotional overwhelm and break through inertia with these strategies for coping — and taking action, sustainably.

Turn Off the Gaslight

Gaslighting can undermine your self-confidence and perception of the truth — but understanding is the first step in getting free.

BY **QUINTON SKINNER**

At a fashionable party, suave Gregory shows his young bride, Paula, his empty watch chain, noting that his time-piece has vanished. When he finds it in her purse, claiming it's evidence of her kleptomania, she breaks down in tears. She doesn't remember stealing it, but her husband is so convincing that she doubts her own perceptions and sanity.

This is a scene from a movie — the 1944 classic *Gaslight* — and it captures a harmful interpersonal dynamic to such a degree that the term “gaslight” has become a colloquialism.

When Paula thinks she's alone in the house, she sees gaslights flicker — because Gregory has lit the lamps in the attic, where he's searching for Paula's late aunt's jewels. In an effort to get what he wants, Gregory cuts Paula's ties to reality: He keeps her in the dark.

Gaslighting is a mode of control that involves trying to convince someone that their memory and motivations are faulty. It differs from ordinary manipulation and lying in that the goal is to persuade the other party to doubt their own reality.

This dynamic often plays out in the political arena, when a candidate denies having said things that were taped or witnessed by others, or when an elected official invents a statistic and insists that it's true.

But it also happens in interpersonal relationships. Your spouse might accuse you of being flirty when you feel you're merely acting friendly. Your boss might insist you're a valued employee even while consistently criticizing you in front of your colleagues. Your friend might say you're overreacting when she's always a half-hour late.

“Often there is a deep-down feeling, for the person being gaslighted, of knowing this is nuts, this is not OK,” says Robin Stern, PhD, associate director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and the author of *The Gaslight Effect: How to Spot and Survive the Hidden Manipulation Others Use to Control Your Life*.

“But somehow you get engaged in what I call the gaslight tango, and you forget where you started. Over time you begin to think the other person may be right.”

Stern describes gaslighting as a dynamic in which both parties are active participants. The gaslighter, broadly speaking, is driven by a need to be right that crosses over into dictating reality.

The person being gaslighted, though, often idealizes the other person and craves their approval — and so they're likely to eventually engage in that altered reality in order to maintain the relationship. Instead

of dismissing the gaslighter's version of events, they participate in no-win arguments that often lead to an erosion of self-confidence in a harmful and intractable pattern.

“Reevaluating the way you think about something is OK, but you're in trouble when you start to believe that there's something wrong with you,” Stern explains. “What will destroy your self-esteem is when you're constantly second-guessing yourself to the point that you can't think straight. You can really lose your grip.”

It's possible to gaslight unintentionally — out of habit or because of patterns adopted early in life — but its most harmful form is deliberate. Gaslighters typically use this tactic as a way to maintain control and to protect their own emotional stability at the expense of others.

There's no standard profile of a gaslighting victim, and often people who are otherwise self-confident and accomplished can be susceptible. Still, there are ways to regain one's footing and self-confidence.

Understand the Dynamic

By definition, no one stumbles into a gaslighting relationship because of a lack of emotional investment. Frequently, the dynamic originates with the victim caring so much about



what the other person thinks that they're rendered vulnerable to doubt and coercion.

Intentional gaslighting "requires a considerable amount of psychological insight," explains University of New England philosophy professor David Livingstone Smith, PhD, author of *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization*. "The gaslighter has to understand what exactly is going to undermine the credence that the other person gives to their own perceptions."

For all the harm that gaslighting does, its foundation rests on a sort of intimacy, as well as a mutual need that turns into an exploitative power dynamic. "You start to doubt yourself," Smith adds. "And you're placed at a disadvantage because we all know we're fallible — particularly when there's something at stake for us."

Recognize Manipulation

Escaping from a gaslighting dynamic can be challenging. Sometimes, it's because a person is stuck trying to convince the gaslighter they're wrong; other times, one's self-esteem becomes so damaged that they think they have no options, or they lose confidence in their own judgment.

"People may stay in gaslighting situations because of sunk cost, a feeling that they have too much invested to leave," says Stephanie Moulton Sarkis, PhD, a therapist and author of *Gaslighting: Recognize Manipulative and Emotionally Abusive People — and Break Free*. "You might have built a life with this person, or they're a parent or a sibling, or it's a pretty good job with a horrible boss."

The first step in changing the situation is recognizing what's happening. People being manipulated in gaslighting relationships often feel numb and joyless, Stern notes.

They also may suffer from disturb-

ing dreams, physical symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches, and feelings of tension and exhaustion.

Recognition of such signs, along with self-reflection, is crucial — as is avoiding the habit of blaming yourself when things go wrong.

"It's about reminding yourself that even if it was inadvertent, or because of your love of love, or because you valued the relationship, you've stepped into a dynamic," Stern explains. "And just as you've stepped into it, you can step out. You do have the power to opt out. It's important to have compassion for yourself along the way, as it may take time and feel quite challenging."

Trust Your Perceptions

Finding solid ground in such a situation can take time and require tenuous steps. Keeping a journal is often eye-opening, particularly if you describe actual interactions and read them when you're in a less reactive emotional state. It's also helpful to talk to a trusted friend who will be honest about what they've witnessed.

An emphasis on general wellness that includes sleep and mindfulness practices, such as meditation and yoga, can bolster the kind of balance you need to trust your own perceptions.

Countering the act of gaslighting in the moment is extremely difficult, especially if you're enmeshed in a dynamic based on undermining or denying your good faith and positive intentions.

Even worse, gaslighters can easily veer into verbal abuse and heightened emotion as means of intimidation.

Stern recommends using phrases such as "I'm not going to continue this conversation right now" (and then walking away), "This is too heated for me right now," and "There's that thing you do" to identify and counter gaslighting. You could also say, "I see

things differently" or "That is your perception, but mine is different."

Stop the Cycle

Sometimes, if both parties are aware of the dynamic and motivated to shift it, the relationship may change. "The important thing is that the gaslighter must take responsibility for their behavior and attend individual therapy on a regular basis," Sarkis says, adding that if the situation is serious, a couple can pursue a trial separation or end the relationship. The same can apply for friendships and family relationships.

Psychologists who work with gaslighting say the pattern often worsens with time or even becomes the core dynamic in a relationship. In these cases, or in situations with a power imbalance, such as a job, leaving may be the only solution.

"Ending these relationships can be much more upsetting than terminating other relationships," Sarkis admits. "But in many toxic situations, the best option is to cut off contact."

Find Self-Compassion

In every case, it's important to approach your situation with self-compassion. Acknowledge your mistakes, believe you can correct them, and work toward rediscovering faith in your perspective.

It also might mean honoring what you've learned from the dynamic while being honest about what's gone wrong. "As humans, we're not out to hurt ourselves. We're in these relationships because we're getting something we think we need," Stern says. "Maybe it's our beloved mother, or we think it's the smartest, most wonderful person we've ever been with, or it's a wonderful job with economic rewards.

"To set boundaries where we never have can be painful. You often have to make a sacrifice, but if you're giving something up, what you are getting back is your integrity." 🧠

QUINTON SKINNER is a Minneapolis-based writer.

By definition,
no one
stumbles into
a gaslighting
relationship
because of a lack
of emotional
investment.



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Defying All Odds

Visionary physician Terry Wahls, MD, beat MS and upset the conventional medical world with a simple, back-to-basics message.

BY DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL

Terry Wahls's story is legendary in health circles: A physician at a Veterans Administration hospital in Iowa and a University of Iowa assistant professor, she was diagnosed in 2000 with multiple sclerosis (MS); three years later, she became dependent upon a tilt/recline wheelchair.

She began taking supplements in hopes of slowing her decline, and then she had a eureka moment: What if she could get what was in her various supplements from real food?

She embarked on a nutrient-dense, unprocessed diet based mainly on leafy and brightly colored vegetables, sulfur-containing vegetables like onions and garlic, and grassfed meats and wild fish. And she made time every day for exercise and meditation.

Within a year of making these changes, Wahls wasn't just up and out of her wheelchair — she was biking, hiking, and horseback riding. Her MS was in remission.

Still, her good news did not get a fairytale reception.

"People were thrilled that I recovered but uneasy that it changed how I practiced medicine," she recalls. "I thought I was creating health; I didn't know that would be a problem."

After she conducted clinical trials and published numerous papers, the medical world began to come around. "It's pretty strange to go from eccentric oddity to brilliant visionary and wise grandmother who led the way."

In 2022, Wahls was gifted \$2.5 million, which she's using to lead a study that examines the effect diet has on the quality of life for people with MS. "I'll probably never win a Nobel Prize for this work — there's nothing to patent. All I'm talking about is food and exercise."

Here's how Wahls continues to care for herself.



GET COLD

"I fill my bathtub with ice water and sit in it. It's an experience! People definitely have to train up to it: Start with cold showers. I sleep better when I take an ice bath — deeper, more intensely — than I do on any other night. You do have to coordinate it with your romantic partner. My wife will say, 'You're too cold — stay on your side of the bed!' If you want to have a romantic evening, don't do an ice bath."

START SMALL

"Patients are often intimidated about making big changes. I always say, 'Start where you're at.' If you think you have no time for self-care, can you do a short breathing meditation after you brush your teeth? Can you walk around the block as a family? Now you have exercise and social connection. Once you make one small positive change, it's easier to add another."



MEDITATE AND MOVE

Tai chi, strength training, bike rides, and more: "I think of meditation and exercise together as self-care, and I try to schedule in an hour and a half or two and a half hours a day. It's important to check in with yourself and give yourself what you need — it's in the name, caring for yourself."

SEEK ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

"I teach clinicians, from nurses to doctors to occupational therapists and psychiatrists.

The most important thing

I teach is: See the whole patient. Encourage patients to think of their aspirational goals — maybe a therapeutic dance class, a mile walk with their family, a bike ride across the state. Everyone's goal is different. Your patient will be successful if their aspirations speak to their heart."



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



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CBD for Mental Health

How this plant compound can help us manage mood and sleep.

BY HENRY EMMONS, MD

For millennia, humans have cultivated a synergistic relationship with the plant world: Plants contain many chemicals that help our bodies work properly. Cannabidiol (CBD), a medicinal ingredient found in hemp, is one of these chemicals, and it's become especially popular of late for supporting mental health and more.

The Endocannabinoid System

CBD belongs to a collection of molecules in the hemp plant known as phytocannabinoids. Interestingly, our bodies produce their own similar chemicals, called endocannabinoids.

We even contain a system built around them: the endocannabinoid system, or ECS. The ECS includes the endocannabinoids themselves as well as the body's specific receptors for them, found in virtually every organ system.

Researchers believe the ECS plays a key role in homeostasis, keeping our bodily systems in balance. It does this, in part, by regulating immunity, tamping down inflammation, reducing pain, and calming the nervous system.

Many prescription drugs used to reduce chronic pain and inflammation try to mimic our endocannabinoids. CBD already resembles them, which may partly explain its effectiveness. There is a prescription CBD product approved to treat seizure disorders, for example. CBD has also been used to relieve symptoms from Parkinson's, Crohn's disease, multiple sclerosis, and the movement disorder dystonia.

CBD and Mental Health

CBD may be best known as a treatment for pain and other inflammatory conditions, but it also supports mental health. It appears to have a toning effect on the nervous system. In my

psychiatric practice, I usually suggest CBD to help calm anxiety, improve sleep, or stabilize mood.

I'm less likely to suggest it for depression if someone's symptoms include sluggishness and lethargy. Yet many people with depression also suffer from anxiety and insomnia, either of which can make it harder to recover from the depression. If we can calm the nervous system, and especially if we can improve sleep, chances of recovery from depression improve dramatically. That's where CBD comes in.

Antidepressants tend to lose their effectiveness over time, and CBD can be helpful here, too: It appears to act directly on serotonin receptors, which is a little different from how the most common antidepressants, the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), work. Augmenting with CBD can give the serotonin system a fresh nudge.

There is also growing evidence that depression is partly an inflammatory disease, which may help explain why traditional antidepressants, such as SSRIs, work better for some than for others: If one's depression is triggered by inflammation, the anti-inflammatory properties of an SSRI may help relieve it. CBD is also a potent anti-inflammatory (and antioxidant) — another possible reason for its antidepressant effects.

What About THC?

People are often confused about the difference between CBD and THC (tetrahydrocannabinol). THC is the psychoactive component of hemp and causes most of the "high" that marijuana is known for; it is still illegal in many states.

CBD, on the other hand, does not have a psychoactive effect and is legal in every state. Products containing it are usually legally required to be

"THC-free," or have less than 0.3 percent THC.

It's fairly obvious that there are many poor-quality CBD products on the market. Independent testing has revealed that a significant number of them contain less CBD and more THC than their labels claim. So think about sourcing CBD in the way you do food — by considering how it's grown and processed.

I recommend CBD that is extracted by a CO₂ process instead of with chemical solvents. Also look for the words "pharmaceutical grade," which indicate the product was produced in an FDA-registered facility and tested by an accredited third-party lab. Do a little background research; reputable companies will describe their quality-control process on their websites.

How Much Is Enough?

The typical dose range for CBD in adults is 15 to 30 mg daily. I usually recommend a "start low, go slow" approach. For conditions involving pain or inflammation, I may recommend a higher dose, but for anxiety, sleep, and mood, I find the typical range is most effective.

Some reports suggest CBD can cause mild sedation. It may also trigger dry mouth and reduced appetite, though I haven't observed either in my patients. Most of CBD's side effects appear to be the result of interactions with other medications, so speak with your provider before taking any supplements — CBD in particular.



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

Living With Climate Anxiety

Move beyond fear, overwhelm, and anger, and respond with your emotional well-being intact.

BY JILL PATTON, FMCHC

I often paddled my kayak toward the middle of the lake to find solace, but that day I felt ill at ease. The lake was low. Water had receded from the shoreline, revealing rock and sand like bared teeth, and marsh grasses stood naked on dry ground.

After a drier-than-normal winter, the summer of 2021 was warmer and more arid than average for Minnesota, and 75 percent of my state was in drought. The unusual conditions in my little corner of the world, experts reported, could be chalked up to climate change, which contributes to jet-stream lags that trap heat over an area longer than normal.

Of course, one low suburban lake is not a crisis. The deathly heat dome over the Pacific Northwest that summer was a crisis. Devastating flooding in China that summer was a crisis. More than 84 million people displaced by climate change in 2021 alone was a crisis.

For me, fretting the particular was a way to mourn the universal.

The Eco-Anxiety Continuum

Our emotional responses to the climate crisis run from denial to despair, grief to guilt, ambivalence to anger. When climate change feels abstract or distant, it can be hard to connect daily life to what's happening on a

larger scale. Or maybe the problem seems too intractable, and we don't know how to respond.

Even if we know the crisis is real, confusion and complexity can lead to a sense of helplessness, which can lead to inaction.

For others, signs of the climate crisis are everywhere, urgency is high, and anxiety is compounded by fury that we're not doing enough, quickly enough, to mitigate it.

"People are experiencing sleeplessness, anger, relationships breaking up," says Sami Aaron, founder of the Resilient Activist, an organization that provides support for those on the front lines of climate

activism. "People are operating in fight-or-flight mode 24/7, which is what happens when we're angry, when we're frustrated — when we can't make any headway."

Transforming Anxiety Into Action

The good news is that learning to work with and through our emotions enables us to advocate for the environment more effectively — which, in turn, helps build our resilience.

"In the grief, fear, and anxiety are seeds of mental health," assures psychotherapist Daniel Masler, PsyD.

These suggestions for managing eco-anxiety offer a place to start.

Acknowledge Your Anxiety

"It's normal to be anxious about the climate," says Masler. "Anxiety is adaptive and practical. When we perceive threats to our environment, we're hardwired to respond — it's part of what keeps us alive."

"If you can begin to accept that this is a normal reaction, then you can confront your suffering. You can look at it in the face and say, 'I'm suffering because the lake is low and I'm scared about drought.' That's a reasonable thing to say. You can start to sit with anxiety as opposed to going into a lot of self-doubt."

Practice Emotional Self-Regulation

Learning to manage your emotions can keep you from spiraling into despair. Deep breathing, guided meditation, and other mindfulness exercises can help you move out of heightened anxiety into an energy state that's more sustainable.

"These practices open you to receptivity and new ways of thinking and imagining how to be," says Aaron.





Spend Time in Nature

For those of us trapped in ambivalence, connecting with nature can propel us forward. “The meaning of nature becomes deeper the more you experience it,” says Masler. “You understand it, and you realize you are part of it.”

But while most people feel calmer and more connected to nature after spending time in the woods or in a park, Aaron cautions that this can backfire for those who are feeling deeply distressed about the environment.

“Especially if your activism has to do with land restoration and land use, and what you see is degraded habitat — mowed lawns, farmland planted with monocrops using chemicals, invasive species everywhere — you need to design a safe space for yourself,” she says.

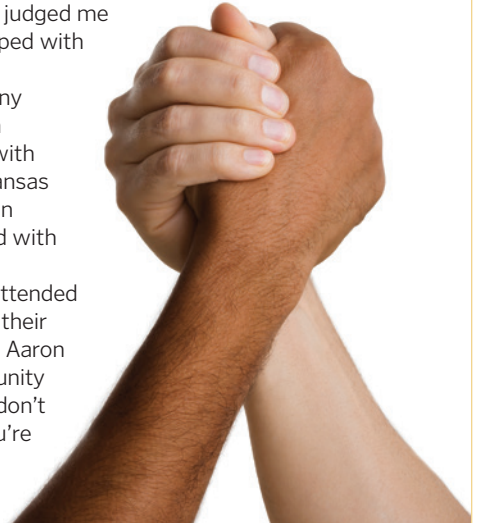
Aaron recommends creating an area — perhaps a garden of native pollinator-friendly plants — where you can relax and experience nature’s beauty without being triggered by all that’s wrong.

Find Your People

At a recent Climate Café, a monthly online gathering hosted by Aaron’s organization, participants swapped stories about sustainable living. The group included college students and retirees, environmentalists and activists, and people, like me, who were there to learn. I logged off feeling relieved (no one judged me for “not doing enough”) and equipped with ideas for changes I could make.

The Resilient Activist hosts many events throughout the year, and in 2020 the organization partnered with researchers at the University of Kansas to discover whether participation in such programming was associated with improved emotions.

“We learned that if an activist attended any one of our events, it increased their emotional well-being measurably,” Aaron notes. “It’s about being in a community of people that get you, where you don’t have to explain yourself, where you’re accepted right where you are, whatever your activism level is.”

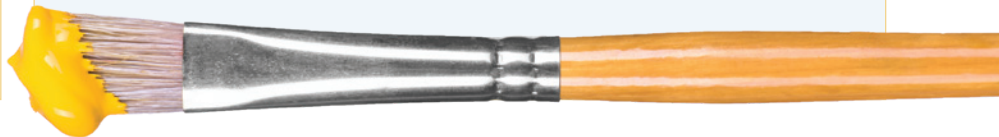


Stop Doomscrolling

“Turn off the news feed. Take a break,” advises Masler. “Instead, do things that bring you joy — go fishing, dance, play pool, make art. When activities we love are approached as practices, they become a way to check in with ourselves and deal with the enormous stress of these historical times.”

“We’re not going to put on our rose-colored glasses,” Aaron adds. “We need to know what’s happening.” But we can set aside time to intentionally shift some of our thoughts into what is working well.

“We can ask, ‘What is beautiful?’” she says. “That’s where the mindfulness comes in.”



Talk About It — Then Take Action

“There’s nothing wrong with having moments of feeling stuck or paralyzed,” says Masler. “But rather than *staying* stuck, we can talk about how we’re feeling with a therapist or with friends who can support us. Then we can take action. Doing something, however small, helps your mental state enormously.”

And taking action doesn’t necessarily mean taking to the streets.

“There are gifts we are born with, things we love to do because they come easily to us,” says Aaron. “I love public speaking. I like writing. If you’re an artist, make posters or create an art installation. If you’re an amazing cookie baker, make some cookies and take them to the protestors.”

The lake near my home was still low during the summer of 2022.

But rather than retreat into gloom, I got outside more often to enjoy quiet sunrises, the heartening cries of red-winged blackbirds, and the graceful flight of blue herons. I wrote postcards on behalf of an organization I believe is doing good work. And Climate Cafés are now a standing date on my calendar. 🍷

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

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How to Create Belonging

Community is more than your immediate neighborhood. Find connection with those who share your values.

BY KARA DOUGLASS THOM



ILLUSTRATIONS: ANDREA COBB

When Rebecca Wallace and her husband, Bob, moved from Texas to Colorado in 2014, they left behind a close-knit community created over 20 years around a small chain of running stores. After selling their stores and retiring to Colorado Springs, Wallace took a methodical approach to forming connections in her new location.

“I had a strong community in Dallas, but because I wasn’t from Colorado Springs, I knew if I was going to have that community again, I needed to create it for myself,” Wallace says. “I’ve been lucky — I make friends easily. I’m not afraid to talk to strangers.”

In 2015, Wallace began volunteering at the nearby Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, where she frequently walked in the afternoons. She also volunteered as a court-appointed special advocate, a role she had always longed to fill but never had the time for before retiring.

She started Iyengar-yoga teacher training at her new yoga studio and formed friendships in her neighborhood — especially with other dog owners — which led to dinners and wine tastings together.

Her involvement in these various communities became a lifeline in 2019, when her husband was diagnosed with brain cancer. Bob died in July 2020, just months after the start of the global pandemic that forced people into isolation.

“I didn’t create these connections with people because I wanted something in return,” recalls Wallace, now 61. “But in our time of need, the floodgates opened.” Friends provided respite care so she could run errands or attend a yoga class; they brought meals or helped her tend Bob’s vegetable garden — a level of support she attributes to the strength of her community.

Defining Community

Before the era of modern transportation and technology, people didn’t choose community; community formed within a relatively small location and was focused on meeting life’s essential needs, such as food and shelter. A community also provided social and emotional support. What and whom you worried about was largely limited to your geographic location.

Today, those of us with the means can travel thousands of miles in a matter of hours and connect with people all over the world instantaneously. We can work, shop, exercise, and socialize remotely. Anyone, anywhere, can form community; the choices of what and whom you support with your energy are limitless.

Unlimited potential seems like progress. And yet the opportunity to create and build our own circles can be overwhelming. Our hyperconnectivity can produce emotional overload and paralysis — we often don’t know where to begin.

Community and clinical psychologist David McMillan, PhD, who began developing a “sense of community” theory in 1976, says community — like love — can be difficult to define. He describes it this way: “Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.”

His original theory included four main elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Later, he began using the terms “art, trust, spirit, and trade,” as he explained in a 1996 article in the *Journal of Community Psychology*.

McMillan believes that a sense of community moves in a circular, self-enforcing pattern. For instance, the **art** that results from telling a community story — of shared connections, events, even drama — honors the members within a community and becomes a symbol that creates **trust** within the group.

That trust fosters a sense of personal safety, encouraging people to be honest and vulnerable, which then strengthens the **spirit** of belonging. Belonging creates responsibility and expectations, which provide structure and also influence members to show up with something of value to meet the needs of the community: **trade**.





The Work of Belonging

Too often, we expect the benefits of friendship to simply appear in our lives; we either fall into fruitful relationships spontaneously or we don't. And social media's fantasy of effortless perfection combined with the pace of modern living can lead to harsh self-criticism when social connections prove elusive.

As if "real-life" relationships weren't hard enough, the pandemic made face-to-face interaction even more rare and fractured — in isolation, it's hard to feel like you "belong" anywhere.

This notion of belonging is a central component of social entrepreneur Radha Agrawal's book, *Belong: Find Your People, Create Community, and Live a More Connected Life*. "To be human is to belong," she writes. "We were literally born in community, attached to someone else."

Belonging, Agrawal believes, is a basic human need, like food, water, and shelter. She cites studies that suggest poor social connection can be as bad for our health as alcoholism. (For more on the health effects of loneliness, see ELmag.com/loneliness.)

With that in mind, Agrawal argues that we should all take care of our community ties with the same intention and effort we bring to our individual health.

But we live in a society that prizes independence and self-reliance, and we're encouraged to discover what makes us unique. Although celebrating our individuality may be good, Agrawal adds that "sharing our unique gifts with the greater whole is vital to our humanity."

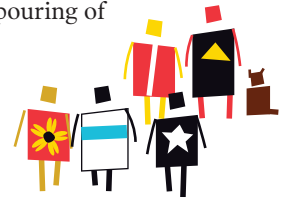
Community Begins With You

"Building a community where we feel a deep sense of belonging requires a real and honest understanding of ourselves first," Agrawal explains. In other words, you must go in before you can go out. She offers five steps to help you "find your people."

- 1. Make a life timeline** that plots your formative events so you better understand your motivations. List the cities you've called home, and add the schools, jobs, relationships, books, movies, and moments — whether big or small — that have shaped you. Rather than a linear chronology, let the shape of your timeline form from the flow of your memories. Invite input from people you trust and take time to sit with your past. "Recognizing all that got us here today and the events that shaped who we are will allow us to move forward with a clearer understanding of ourselves, what we want, and why," Agrawal writes.
- 2. Take inventory** of your values, interests, and abilities to better align with the types of community you hope to serve — and that can serve you, too. Human-resources departments often gather these sorts of personal insights to evaluate the fit of potential candidates for their organizations. Why not make this same assessment for your friendships and community?
- 3. Apply this self-knowledge** as you research up to 10 communities before narrowing your list to two or three you'd want to explore. Use online resources for research and perhaps to make initial connections, but think of them as stepping stones to your eventual interaction with a three-dimensional community.
- 4. Seek out "five-sense friends."** Paying attention to our five senses in all our relationships, not just romantic ones, is critical for belonging. "We've replaced our ability to 'feel' one another through our animal instincts and five senses with 'judging our emoji game,'" Agrawal writes. "When all five of our senses are activated and firing on all cylinders, we feel happiest and most connected to one another." In seeking out five-sense friends, try to be one of those friends for others in your life, too. That means making eye contact, listening closely, eating meals together, and touching (with consent). This proximity to others means you're close enough to get a whiff of each other's pheromones — those hormones we secrete that are detected by others through smell, which can influence social bonds.
- 5. Positively participate.** "Participation with a positive attitude is the ultimate key to belonging," Agrawal writes. "You'll feel the most emotionally invested and connected to others in the group by getting your hands dirty and offering your time and energy to enhance the community experience. The sweat and effort of doing something for the benefit of the greater whole will fill you with the most satisfaction and joy. This is also how people come to view you as someone they want to be around, know more about, and care for."

That certainly holds true for Wallace, who, shortly after her husband's diagnosis, joined another like-minded community — one for caregivers. As someone who is typically a "giver," she can appreciate the full expression of belonging in community, especially given how her circle supported her during such a tough time in her life. "A lot of people were there to help me, and I know it made them feel good, too," she recalls. "The outpouring of support I received still makes me tear up to this day." 🧡

KARA DOUGLASS THOM is a Twin Cities-based freelance writer.



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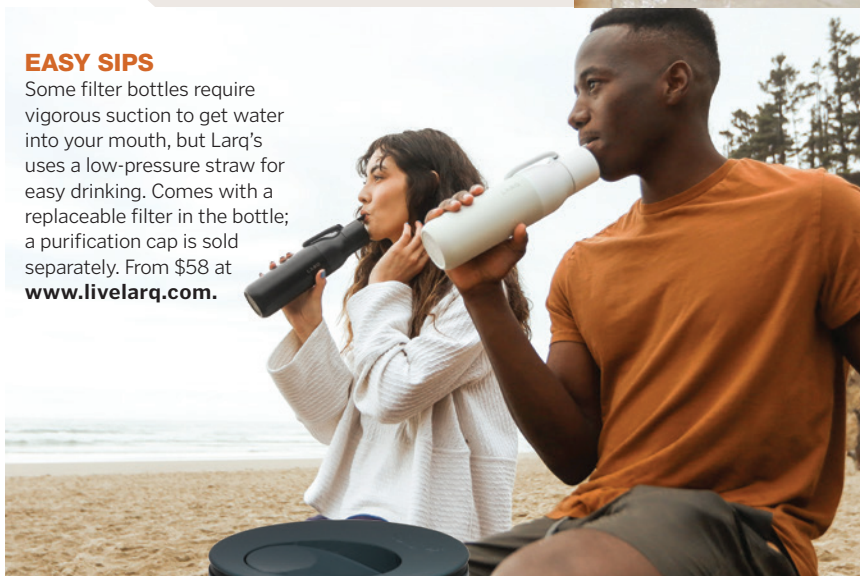
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Sweet Solitude

When we take the time to be alone, on our terms, we create space for reflection and possibility.

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

As human beings, we are social creatures. We are wired for and enjoy being together. Understanding the importance of relationships, we tend to thrive on interaction. Our bodies and our minds are healthier when we're connected with others.

But that's not the whole story. As much as we crave companionship, there's another important aspect to our well-being: the need to be alone.

This idea might initially scare many of us. We don't want to be left out. What if we get bored? Or, even worse, what if we feel lonely?

Yet, as theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich so beautifully explained, "Our language . . . has created the word 'loneliness' to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word 'solitude' to express the glory. . . ."

Today, this glorious solitude has never been more important. In a world that seems to be spinning faster by the second, we've invented infinite ways to save time and stay connected. And we've somehow made ourselves busier and created distance.

It's gotten complicated. Schedules go from bell to bell. We're more turned on and tuned in than ever. Sights, sounds, and stimuli seem to come at us around the clock.

We are inundated at an almost diabolical velocity with news, and videos and photos of other people's lives, other people's dinners, and other people's kids and cats. We hustle to soccer practices and piano lessons, fill our calendars, make commitments, give our attention to how-to's and gotta-haves. And it's 24/7.

With everyone and everything crashing at us constantly, with such tenacity, how is it possible to remem-

ber who we are? What we're here for? What matters?

In the cacophony and confusion, how do we hear our own voice? How do we connect to our solitary yet mighty self — our curious, conscious heart, our brilliant brain, and the bundles of atoms knit into our skin — let alone make sense of everything that's coming in?

To find ourselves, we must find the time for seeking out and creating solitude.

Solitude is not an exile or an exit. It's an invitation. To unfold. To loosen time's grasp. To clear some space. To redirect attention.

Solitude may start with the simple practice of closing your eyes, taking a breath, then opening to a new direction. This could lead to a walk. Then, a walk without a phone.

It can show up in mornings, in music, in meditation. On a bus ride, in the car, at the coffee shop. In a brief 20 minutes, you can become a different — and maybe better? — person.

Just because you are alone.

Solitude can often be found in a place. Many believe its effects intensify outdoors. In the words of John Muir, "Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves."

What a beautiful thing: solitude heightening your senses, intimately grounding you through sights, smells, and sounds to the world around you. You witness a different glow of

summer's sunset; you hear your own wistful, earthy exhale of the fall.

Often perceived as stillness, solitude may seem quiet, as though things have stopped and nothing really is happening, but there is so much at work.

In a few moments by yourself, your mind may open, your soul may inexplicably expand. Breath deepens. Blood pressure lowers. Cells regenerate.

Magically, knots seem to untangle. Riddles unravel. Evasive, secret things that have been distant come near. Cloudy thoughts become crystal clear and then . . . creativity sparks. Occasionally, goosebumps appear.

Peace. Quietude. Stillness. Reverie. Call it what you will, solitude is how, in today's world, we create the much-needed space for ongoing reflection. This is the essence for knowing who we are, which is some of life's most formative and important work.

As we move into the holidays, my hope is that you remember you are empowered to seek out, protect, and nourish your solitude. Start small. Find moments to contemplate the nothingness. Schedule time into your day, and guard it.

Don't be afraid to be selfish. Say no to the things that take you away from you. Purposely try to check out of the hustle and bustle. Take every opportunity you can to remember and appreciate who you are, while imagining who you can become.

This is yours, this gift of glorious solitude.

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





Every moment is auspicious.
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— AMIT RAY



La Sportiva athlete **KELLY WOLF** wears the new Akasha II, Mountain Running® T-shirt and Timing Short while training in Colorado

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