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LIFE TIME

October 2022

Live & Learn

ULTRA-ENDURANCE-TRIATHLETE-
TURNED-PODCASTER

RICH ROLL

ON BREAKING FREE OF CONVENTIONS
AND EXPECTATIONS — AND
EXPANDING YOUR PERSPECTIVES.

p. 16

**CONSISTENCY,
CURIOSITY,
COMPASSION**

THE 3 Cs OF
LIFELONG FITNESS

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THE 5 PILLARS OF
SUSTAINABLE
SOBRIETY

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SLEEP WELL
A NUTRIENT-FIRST
APPROACH

p. 40

**HEARTY SALADS
FOR FALL** p. 48

October 2022

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NUTRITION FOR Healthy Aging

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CANDY CORN CHIA PUDDING

Make a delectable coconut-milk parfait for Halloween — and, no, there's not really candy corn in it. We simply mimic the effect by creating a turmeric-spiked yellow layer, an orange layer that includes pumpkin purée, and a vanilla-flavored white layer. **ELmag.com/falltreats**

CLEAR YOUR CALENDAR

This fall, slow down by decluttering your calendar. We share tips to identify your core values, take inventory of your schedule, and create more open space for what truly matters to you. **ELmag.com/decluttercalendar**

NINE HEALING HERBS

Explore nine plant-based herbal remedies (including feverfew, lemon balm, and calendula) that may help treat migraines, IBS, chapped skin, and more. **ELmag.com/healingherbs**



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You'd think after living in this body for nearly 40 years I would have known and accepted these features. **Except I didn't and I hadn't.**"



YOUR THOUGHTS?

Email us at experiencelife@experiencelife.com.

Free to Be Me

This month, I turn 40 . . . an age I clearly remember thinking was so *old* when my parents reached it in my teen years. Blink, and now I'm the one who has two preteen daughters and is about to hit this milestone. If you follow me on Instagram, you might know that #slowdowntime is one of my go-to hashtags — and it rings true here.

Over the last several months, I've been reflecting on my life up to this point, where I want to go next, and how I want to mark this step into the next decade. The obvious birthday events are on the calendar — taking the day off work and celebrating with family and friends — but I also decided to do a few things that have been on my wish list for a while.

One of those things was to work with a personal stylist to discover the colors, styles, and shapes that best complement my features and body type. I'd managed to navigate a professional environment and various media opportunities without a stylist's help for 15-plus years, but my recent foray into video/audio podcasting made me realize I could be making some more flattering choices. (If you haven't checked out the *Life Time Talks* podcast yet, you can find all the episodes at ELmag.com/lttalks.)

So, this past spring, as an early 40th-birthday gift to myself, I hired a stylist, with a few goals: (1) incorporate more color into my wardrobe; (2) learn about the styles that work with my body shape; (3) get comfortable being a bit bolder with my clothing choices; and (4) invest in a few foundational pieces that will go the distance.

I figured this would be a largely aesthetic endeavor — and I initially felt pretty self-conscious about the investment. But as I moved through the process, I realized I was getting more out of the experience than I'd expected.

It turned out to be a much-needed wake-up call around my body misperception. I've always had a more athletic build, and yet I've constantly strived to look and dress like the tall, lean women I see in so many images across the media landscape. Even after nearly two decades of working for a whole-life health-and-fitness magazine that aims to feature a diverse group of people of various body shapes and sizes, I was still pursuing an idealized physique.

I've learned that my shape, in fact, is rectangle in combination with pear — not the inverted triangle that I'd been chasing. I have broad shoulders, wide hips, and little waist definition. You'd think after living in this body for nearly 40 years I would have known and accepted these features. Except I didn't and I hadn't. I continued to fight them, consciously and unconsciously.

Working with my stylist helped me realize I was ready to face reality. I was ready to finally and fully embrace my actual body instead of resenting that it wasn't what I imagined it could be — to break free from the desire for culturally influenced aesthetics and instead build on the assets I have always had.

It's been a game-changing experience for me, much like when I first discovered how much I love strength training. I feel more confident, more positive, more hopeful. For the first time in a long time — maybe even since I was a kid — I feel free in this body that's my home.

This experience turned out to be one of the best birthday presents I could've given myself; I only wish I'd done it sooner.

But that's what life is all about: Live and learn (the theme of this issue) and, hopefully, grow. Cheers!

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



GO-TO MOVEMENT

✉ Thank you for the article “The Pool Workout” (June 2022). My teenage son keeps taking weights into the pool — I can see them sitting outside as I type — and I keep telling him to stop doing that. Now I see that weights can be used in the pool, and this article will provide him with a proper and effective routine to follow. Harmony is restored!
Kym K.

🗣 I've been biking for years (“The Health Benefits of Cycling,” April 2022). But when the pandemic hit, I started riding three days a week — 32 miles on each outing. I have not had a cold or flu, and I feel outstanding. I will be biking until I drop dead.
David P.

NEW HOPE FOR LYME SUFFERERS

[On “A New Look at Chronic Lyme,” June 2022]

✉ My daughter had Lyme disease in 2006, when she was a senior in high school. Her rash was not the typical “target,” so the physician wouldn't consider it Lyme and give her antibiotics. I took her to a homeopathic practitioner who treated her using vials of different liquids by touching them to her. She also did tapping on different areas of her body and had her touch her fingertips together

while holding vials on her. Yes, it was really strange!

We got home and I helped her into bed. A little while later, I went to check on her and she was at our computer doing research on homeopathic medicine. I was astonished! She had not been able to walk by herself or sit up in a chair. I continued to take her to the practitioner until she was well enough to go back to school. Luckily, she was able to finish her schoolwork and graduate on time.
Jeanne W.

🗣 Thanks for a well-written and informative article! I wonder if bee-venom therapy (BVT) is on your radar. There is some clinical research to support it and quite a bit of anecdotal evidence. So far, I am responding better to BVT than I ever did to all the other things I tried over the last seven years. It's not just the tick-borne disease symptoms that are improving; some of the other issues that come from chronic illness (although it can be hard to know the difference) also improved after just a few weeks.
Brian O.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

🗣 I have discovered a method that keeps salt intake down and flavor high (“Salt: Small Decreases Bring Big Rewards,” June 2022). I buy only coarse salt — usually Himalayan or

Trapani — and grind it at the time of use. This accomplishes two things: increased awareness and increased flavor.
Louisa A.

🗣 I have severe arthritis and psoriasis. I have found that nightshades are not good for me, although I love them. The section in this article (“How to Make Nightshades More Digestible,” July 2022) on how to mitigate the effect of nightshades is so helpful!
Sandi B.

🗣 Great article (“How to Navigate Nightshade Foods,” July 2022) and tips on ways for people to find tasty alternatives to nightshade foods. I plan on trying many of these suggestions.
Juliet L.

THE ANGUISH OF AMBIGUOUS LOSS

🗣 My husband was diagnosed with glioblastoma in April 2012. Since then, he has undergone three craniotomies, three years of chemotherapy, and six weeks of radiation. The last 10 years have been an emotional roller coaster: frustration, sadness, anger, mourning, begging to God.

A friend whose husband died recently from this same cancer sent me this article (“Coping With Ambiguous Loss,” June 2022), and I cried that there are others out there like me.
Amy G.

THE DEBT EFFECT

🗣 There are many emotions that are affected by the stress of debt, and this article (“Out From Under: Escaping the Burdens of Debt Stress,” March 2009) really resonates with this reader. I am a compulsive spender, and this trait only rears its ugly head when other things in my life get out of balance.
Melissa R.

A REFRESHING READ

✉ Thank you for always publishing an insightful, mindful, helpful, stressless, and approachable magazine. I look forward to getting it, always find valuable information, and have learned so much about my health and wellness habits and just things of interest. The fact that it's a hard copy means I've got it to read in the sun, in the shade, or wherever.

It's so refreshing to read about the whole person, surroundings, and everyday things that may or may not be supporting health and wellness. Bravo!
Rochelle S.



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The Life-Enhancing Potential of Exercise

A raft of recent research is reinforcing the long-held notion that even a little exercise can go a long way in extending our lifespans. Consider these notable stats.

• **ABOUT 110,000 DEATHS COULD BE PREVENTED** each year if middle-aged and older U.S. adults spent as little as 10 minutes more per day engaging in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, according to Pedro Saint-Maurice, PhD, and his team, who tracked data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. “These findings support implementing evidence-based strategies to improve physical activity for adults and potentially reduce deaths in the United States,” Saint-Maurice writes in the March 2022 issue of *JAMA*.

• **LACK OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR 8.3 PERCENT OF ALL DEATHS** among U.S. adults 25 and older between

1990 and 2011, a 2018 study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found. Among those 40 to 69 years old, that portion rose to nearly 10 percent.

• **PEOPLE WHO EXERCISED FOR 150 MINUTES PER WEEK WERE 25 PERCENT LESS LIKELY TO DIE** during a nearly 23-year period compared with their inactive peers, a 2015 British study discovered. “If everyone adhered to recommended or even low activity levels,” the authors noted in the *European Journal of Epidemiology*, “a substantial proportion of premature mortality might be avoided.”

• **A MERE 20 MINUTES OF DAILY EXERCISE SIGNIFICANTLY LOWERS THE RISK OF HEART DISEASE**, concluded a study involving about 3,000 Italian seniors that was pub-

lished in the March 2022 issue of the journal *Heart*. Even those who waited until age 70 to ramp up their physical activity realized long-term cardiovascular benefits.

• **IT’S NEVER TOO LATE TO START MOVING YOUR BODY**, according to a meta-analysis presented at the 2021 European Society of Cardiology Congress. Researchers examined the activity levels of almost 34,000 people — average age 62.5 — over a period of about seven years. Formerly inactive participants who ramped up their exercise routines enjoyed a 45 percent lower risk of all-cause mortality compared with those who remained sedentary.

That’s an encouraging outcome, given that longtime exercisers who maintained their regimen during the study period enjoyed a 50 percent lower risk.

Among those diagnosed with heart disease, researchers reported similar results. Dedicated exercisers were 51 percent less likely than their inactive counterparts to die from the disease; late bloomers had a 27 percent lower risk.

“The results show that continuing an active lifestyle over the years is associated with the greatest longevity,” notes lead study author Nathalia Gonzalez, MD. “However, patients with heart disease can overcome prior years of inactivity and obtain survival benefits by taking up exercise later in life.”

No matter your age, the evidence linking exercise of any sort with a longer, healthier life continues to mount.



The results show that continuing an active lifestyle over the years **is associated with the greatest longevity.**”

— CRAIG COX





YOUR BRAIN on Love

Singers have long crooned that “love is a many-splendored thing,” but now modern brain scans are uncovering various splendors not hailed in melodies.

“My scientific research on the brain has convinced me that a healthy love life is as necessary to a person’s well-being as nutritious food, exercise, or clean water,” says

Stephanie Cacioppo, PhD, assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral neuroscience at the University of Chicago and author of *Wired for Love*.

Although she has studied maternal love and the affection we feel for friends, pets, work, and sports, her research focuses on romantic love, including the following findings.



Why We Love With All Our Brain

We tend to think of love as a matter of the heart, but it’s actually focused in the brain. And it doesn’t center on any one area.

“The brain prizes versatility and likes to spread its work across many regions,” Cacioppo explains.

These include the deep emotional portions; the frontal lobe, which is responsible for high-level intellectual and cognitive function (as well as feeling pain, including so-called heartbreak); and even the angular gyrus, which is peculiar to apes and humans and is connected to creativity and abstract thought.

“By looking deep into the brains of people in love,” Cacioppo says, “we discover that this complex neurobiological phenomenon activates not just the brain’s mammalian pleasure centers but also our cognitive system, the most evolved, intellectual parts of the brain that we use to acquire knowledge and make sense of the world around us.”



Why Love Feels So Euphoric

“The first thing you’ll notice if you’ve ever fallen in love is how good it feels,” Cacioppo notes. “Falling in love sets off a whole array of biological fireworks.”

Love prompts the brain to release glucose and adrenaline, providing bolts of extra energy. Dopamine sparks the brain’s feel-good reward circuitry, the same areas triggered when someone eats delicious food, drinks alcohol, listens to their favorite music, or uses heroin.

Norepinephrine spikes, focusing attention, but it can also cause flighty feelings and make us lose track of time. Serotonin plummets to a level similar to that of someone suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder. Physical contact — or even looking into your beloved’s eyes — stimulates oxytocin, “the bonding hormone,” which supports feelings of bonding and trust.

These hormones result in love’s sense of euphoria, Cacioppo says. “Romantic love feels like a superpower that makes the brain thrive.”



Why We Need Love in Our Lives

Love is a biological necessity, Cacioppo believes; it’s been essential to helping us develop and evolve. And new research shows that love makes us stronger — emotionally, cognitively, and even physically.

“Those in satisfying, healthy long-term romantic relationships sleep better. They have better immune function. They exhibit fewer addictive behaviors. They suffer fewer recurrent strokes. They even have a better survival rate for some diseases (including some cancers),” she says. “Love not only has a calming effect on stress but also promotes healing.”

And love is important not just to our lives but also to the survival of the species. The ability to feel love and build social connections allowed Homo sapiens to outlast the larger, stronger Neanderthals, Cacioppo states.

“Love helps us realize our innate human potential,” she adds. “We need to love others to survive.”

— MICHAEL DREGNI



CULTIVATING CARTILAGE FOR Joint Repair

Some 55 million Americans suffer from joint pain and arthritis. Recent developments, however, offer hope for new ways to deal with this epidemic.

Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston operates a Cartilage Repair Center, where surgeons use a procedure called autologous chondrocyte implantation to regenerate damaged cartilage: They remove healthy cartilage cells from a patient's creaky knee, culture them in the lab, and then inject the new cells into the joint. The treatment, together with physical therapy, has been shown to delay joint-replacement surgery for some patients.

This type of "Jiffy Lube" approach to joint repair is what Michael Longaker, MD, and his Stanford University colleagues envision as a way to perhaps prevent surgical solutions. "You don't wait for damage to accumulate," he explains. "You go in periodically and use this technique to boost your articular cartilage before you have a problem."

Their research suggests that scientists may be able to regrow articular cartilage by causing a slight injury to the tissue before using chemical signals to promote the growth of skeletal stem cells during the healing process.

Most recently, a 2022 study published in *Science Translational Medicine* describes how University of Connecticut scientists were able to regrow cartilage in a rabbit's knee by implanting a tissue scaffold made from nanofibers that produce a weak electrical current. Known as piezoelectricity, the current encourages cartilage growth.

More work needs to be done before the procedure can be tested on larger animals, including humans, reports lead study author Yang Liu, PhD.

— CRAIG COX

Creatine: IT'S NOT JUST FOR BODYBUILDERS

Bodybuilders have been using creatine for years, yet this supplement — which is appropriate for nearly everyone — is underrated and often misunderstood among the general population.

Research has found that creatine helps muscles produce energy, improving power output along with muscle force and mass. It's also commonly known for supporting protein synthesis and reducing fatigue. (And despite common misconceptions, creatine is not a steroid and doesn't damage healthy kidneys.)

These are some of the factors it affects and the benefits it can offer.

BODY COMPOSITION: Along with exercise, creatine supplementation supports increases in fat-free mass and muscle mass, which reduces body-fat percentage.

PERFORMANCE: Athletes who participate in sports requiring optimal power output have found creatine supplementation to improve their performance. One study of high-intensity runners found that a combination of creatine, caffeine, and amino acids improved their capacity: At the highest intensities, they were able to push for longer periods before reaching a point of exhaustion.

RECOVERY: Creatine has been shown to improve recovery and blunt inflammatory markers after exercisers experience muscle damage.

BLOOD-SUGAR REGULATION: Some studies have concluded that creatine supports healthy blood-sugar levels, possibly by helping muscles store more sugar as glycogen (rather than letting it linger in the bloodstream) or by ushering blood sugar into cells through special doorways called GLUT-4 transporters.

HEART HEALTH: The heart requires a highly functioning phosphocreatine (the form of creatine that's stored in the muscles) system to deal with stress or periods of increased workload, such as exercise.

BONE HEALTH: Studies show that creatine might enhance bone density via a strength-training program, possibly thanks to bolstered workout efficacy and increases in lean muscle.

FATIGUE: Adequate sleep is paramount to health. When you experience a restless night, creatine supplementation may ease some of the side effects, such as reduced testosterone, changes in memory and motor skills, and a decline in executive function.

AGING: Our lean body mass becomes increasingly important as we age; supplementing with creatine can help mitigate some losses in strength, particularly grip strength and lower-body endurance.

FOOD SOURCES, including meat, fish, and poultry, are the richest dietary sources of creatine, but you need supplementation to match the therapeutic amounts found in most research studies. The body also produces it, in limited quantities, when the amino acid arginine is added to glycine and then goes through a process called methylation.

— SAMANTHA MCKINNEY, RD, CPT



FIND FURTHER BENEFITS

For more on creatine, along with supplementation advice, see ELmag.com/creatine.



Understanding Social Anxiety Disorder

Most of us become nervous, shy, or self-conscious around others from time to time. But for some people, the anxiety feels so excruciating that they dread social situations or even avoid them entirely.

Social anxiety disorder, also known as social phobia, is one of the most common mental-health disorders. Most people who have it develop it during adolescence.

Onset in adulthood is relatively rare:

Seventy-five percent of individuals who meet the criteria for the disorder began experiencing symptoms before age 15. And sometimes those who struggle with social anxiety in adolescence find that it resolves or at least becomes manageable with age. (Though individuals with social anxiety disorder are more likely to live alone.)

When it doesn't resolve, the disorder can be disruptive; it's associated with an elevated risk of leaving school, which often leads to a lower socioeconomic status.

It also comes with a higher risk for other mental-health conditions, including depression and substance use.

Moreover, the longer the condition goes untreated, the worse it can become; avoidance acts as a form of kindling.

Social anxiety disorder is characterized by persistent, debilitating anxiety in social situations, such as striking up a conversation with someone new, eating or drinking in front of others, speaking in front of a group, or simply mingling with unfamiliar people.

Individuals with this disorder tend to avoid such scenarios — skipping school or declining invitations for

social gatherings — or, at best, endure them with gritted teeth.

People with social anxiety fear that others are judging, mocking, or otherwise scrutinizing their behavior. Some worry that people judge the visible manifestations of their anxiety, like flushed cheeks or sweaty palms.

Sufferers often imagine themselves inadvertently offending someone

or humiliating themselves in public. These fears

can generate significant anticipatory anxiety (worrying in advance) and rumination (worrying after the fact), resulting in anguish that begins long before one even leaves the house — and persists long after.

This represents a crucial distinction between social anxiety and introversion. Introverts may find social gatherings draining or generally prefer to be alone, but they do not experience the kind of gut-wrenching discomfort that accompanies true social anxiety.

The longer the condition goes untreated, the worse it can become; **avoidance acts as a form of kindling.**

And though people with social anxiety tend to rate higher on scores of introversion, studies suggest that some 38 percent of sufferers are actually extroverts. In other words, one can desire *and* dread social connection at the same time.

An individual diagnosed with the disorder typically experiences symptoms across multiple social settings. Someone who becomes anxious about speaking in front of a crowd but feels comfortable navigating parties and meeting new people would not necessarily meet the criteria for the disorder.

For a person to qualify for the diagnosis, their symptoms must persist for at least six months, which helps rule out social anxiety stemming from situational factors such as a recent breakup or change in appearance. 📌

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC



LEARN MORE

For additional reading on the causes of and treatments for social anxiety, visit ELmag.com/socialanxiety.

SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER AND THE PANDEMIC

We know that avoiding our fears only strengthens them. For those who already struggled with social anxiety disorder prior to the pandemic, calls to avoid gathering in public may have served a reinforcing function.

A 2021 study of socially anxious college students found that symptoms remained high during pandemic lockdowns compared with previous years, when symptoms abated over time — further evidence that exposure to social situations helps mitigate anxiety, while avoidance can reinforce it.

But what about people who didn't necessarily exhibit symptoms prior to the pandemic? Attempts to identify a causal link between social distancing and the onset of social anxiety have been inconclusive; only time will tell whether rates increase among a generation of children who faced prolonged social isolation. Among those already susceptible to social anxiety — whether by nature, nurture, or a combination of the two — it's possible that the pandemic will set the wheels in motion.

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VOICING CHANGE

ULTRA-ENDURANCE ATHLETE, AUTHOR, AND PODCASTER RICH ROLL REFLECTS ON BREAKING FREE OF LIMITATIONS, TRUSTING YOUR INSTINCTS, AND CREATING A VIBRANT LIFE.

BY **JILL PATTON, FMCHC**

PHOTO BY **KWAKU ALSTON**

Rich Roll pushes boundaries, often to the extreme. He catapulted to the top of the world of ultra-endurance athletes in 2009 when he finished ahead of all Americans competing in the grueling Ultraman World Championships — at age 43. He then went on to complete other endurance events and is widely recognized for his athleticism and fitness.

But it was the highs and lows of his personal journey that captured the attention of people outside the circle of extreme sports: He almost lost his life to drug and alcohol addiction before getting sober at 31. He shed 50 pounds in his early 40s by adopting a vegan diet while training religiously for ultra-triathlons. And he abandoned a legal career and financial security to reinvent himself as an author, speaker, and podcast host.

Since publishing his bestselling memoir, *Finding Ultra*, in 2012, Roll has produced nearly 700 episodes of his eponymous podcast. He has conversed with a wide range of luminaries in the areas of health, nutrition, and athletic performance, exploring how to live a life of vitality and purpose.

Scrolling through the archives of *The Rich Roll Podcast*, one can trace the arc of his curiosity. “I can’t do what I do and be engaged with it unless it’s of genuine interest to me personally,” he acknowledges. And what interests him is transformation and escaping the limitations imposed on us by ourselves and others.

“Reinvention isn’t just a privilege; it is the work that we are here to do,” he says. “You have to be willing to transcend your story based on your courage to try and fail and learn. The way for me to do that is to have people on the podcast who challenge my worldviews and push me into uncomfortable terrain, so that I can evolve along with my audience.”

“

**YOU HAVE
TO BE WILLING TO
TRANSCEND YOUR
STORY BASED ON
YOUR COURAGE
TO TRY AND FAIL
AND LEARN.”**



Q&A

WITH RICH ROLL

EXPERIENCE LIFE | How has your podcast evolved over the past decade?

RICH ROLL | My intent from the beginning was to continue the conversation *Finding Ultra* started, but also to expand my own growth — to learn from the best people I could find in other areas of life. So, although the podcast has always had a nutrition-and-athletics bent, I have slowly widened the aperture.

After the murder of George Floyd and all the political turmoil that came from that, plus the pandemic, it felt strange to be publishing episodes about the microbiome. Cities were burning. I felt compelled to use this platform to speak to some of these issues with the *Roll On* podcast series I do with journalist Adam Skolnick.

That was definitely a risk. People weren't tuning in to my show to have hard discussions about race or politics, and I've gotten some pushback. But it doesn't feel right to *not* tackle that type of challenging subject matter.

EL | Do you think a podcast can be part of the solution to our society's problems?

RR | I believe conversation is required to navigate the complexities and problems we face as a culture. We have to grapple with real, vulnerable, nuanced conversation in all of its messiness.

And listen, I'm a privileged white male — does anyone need to hear from me on these topics? What is my role in facilitating these conversations? One of the things I've learned is to turn to people who are closer than I am to the issues I want to tackle.

For instance, I went to Minneapolis during the week leading up to the verdict in the trial for Floyd's murder. I was able to talk with residents and civic leaders, including the mayor and members of the city council, who helped me better understand all the complexities so I could translate them for my audience to take to heart.

EL | Has your audience demographic shifted with your widening lens?

RR | For a long time I operated on the assumption that my audience was super into running and vegan nutrition, but over time I've learned that the audience is instead surprisingly diverse. I think that speaks to the breadth of subject matter.

I hear audience members say they didn't think they would be interested in this person or that area, but they ended up being fascinated, or it opened a new door for them. And then there's a cohort that says, "I didn't care for that one at all." That's how I know I'm doing it right.

EL | You've said that pain is the greatest motivator and catalyst for change in your own life. How has your work affected your personal development?

RR | I would be dishonest if I told you I'm now able to grow pain-free. I'm still a highly flawed individual who is resistant to breaking free from my own behavior patterns. What I am willing to do is have people on the show who challenge me. Do I translate that wisdom into my own life? Sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes imperfectly.

EL | You started your health journey at 40 and are turning 56 this month. How has aging changed your outlook on life?

RR | Health for me is inextricably tied to longevity. My grandfather, who was also a champion swimmer, died of a heart attack at 54 — before I had a chance to meet him. I'm named after him, I look like him, and for a long time, I was afraid of meeting the fate he met.

We're now seeing athletes performing at the highest level well into their 40s and beyond, which is super interesting to talk about. We're



I BELIEVE CONVERSATION IS REQUIRED TO NAVIGATE THE COMPLEXITIES AND PROBLEMS WE FACE AS A CULTURE. WE HAVE TO GRAPPLE WITH REAL, VULNERABLE, NUANCED CONVERSATION IN ALL OF ITS MESSINESS."

also having breakthroughs in technology and healthcare around the extension of lifespan and health span, and I find that fascinating terrain for exploration.

But I'm even more

interested in what we can do ourselves to be as vibrant as possible for as long as possible — whether through daily movement practices, what we put in our mouths, the communities we keep, or our relationship to faith or to the unknown.

EL | How have you grown as a host — and as a person?

RR | I've learned to trust my instincts and to follow my own muse, and that has been a pretty good compass for how I make decisions.

Also, I'm willing to be vulnerable, which is a skill I've learned in recovery, sitting through thousands of AA meetings and bearing witness to people mustering the courage to get up and admit their faults and tell their story. That's given me permission to do the same in my private life and in my public life. I can create a cocoon where my guests meet me in a vulnerable place, and I'm able to draw from them something special that perhaps they wouldn't have felt comfortable saying to a different kind of host.

EL | What makes you happiest now?

RR | When my kids are happy, that's my greatest joy.

From a career perspective, I'm happiest when what I get to do for a living lines up with what I would do for free. As long as the podcast is rooted in my own genuine curiosity, it's a joyous place. 🧘

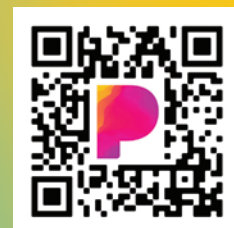
JILL PATTON, FMCHC, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor and certified functional-medicine health coach.

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Practicing Presence

This mindfulness technique can help you stop stressing about the past and worrying about the future — by bringing you back to the present.

BY **SPIWE
JEFFERSON,
CMP, JD**

Do you ever feel irritable or frustrated for no apparent reason? Perhaps your patience is thin and you find yourself lashing out at those around you. Often, this reactivity stems from ruminating over the past (*Why did I do that? If I could just change that one action ...*) or worrying about the future (*What if this or that happens?*).

Yet it's futile to relive the past and impossible to know what tomorrow will bring. Ruminating and worrying distract us from truly showing up for ourselves and others.

Mindfulness meditation, however, can help us tame these negative thought patterns. The

foundation of a mindfulness practice involves residing in the present moment without judgment or expectations. Acknowledging the past from this place of neutrality can empower us to work more effectively toward our goals.

Meditation can help ease anxiety and pain as well as quell irritability and depression. Most important, it can help us appreciate each moment.

To harness this power, start each day with at least five minutes of silent meditation. You can use the CRAB technique, described below, to get unstuck first thing in the morning, then revisit it throughout the day to ground yourself.

CONNECT with your intention to be truly well.

RECOGNIZE whatever emotions are within you in the moment, without evasion or judgment. Take a few calming breaths. Smile slightly.

ACCCEPT how the emotions feel in your mind and body, exploring them with compassionate curiosity. Allow yourself to move past internal tension, acknowledging your own natural wish for the body to be comfortable.

BRING forward a few phrases to connect with your intention, such as *I choose light*, or *May I be free of this negativity*.

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

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From top: Mia Huynh in Minneapolis, Minn., in February 2021; with her grandma and cousins in November 2018.



From Caregiving to Self-Caring

While pursuing a dramatic career change, a former nursing student learns how to prioritize herself and her needs.

BY MIA HUYNH

When I arrived at the facility where my grandma was staying, in August 2020, I was startled to find her on comfort care, or end-of-life care without curative intent. My cousin had told me my grandma's health was declining, but I hadn't realized how close to death she really was.

She wasn't allowed food or drink, and she took oral morphine as needed, which was often. I knew that she likely had less than a few weeks to live; the nurse clarified that it would probably be just days.

During these final days with my grandma, I stepped into the role of caregiver along with my cousin Julie, who was a pharmacy student at the time. I was a nursing student, so I had experience assisting with the administration of medications and taking care of others. I changed her, washed her, and generally tended to her personal hygiene.

My family couldn't bear the physical demands of cleaning my grandma and adjusting her position. It upset them to see how much pain those activities could cause. Yet I dealt with these conditions regularly in my courses and job, so it seemed natural for me to step in, and to try to keep her as comfortable as possible.

Even so, the experience of caring for her took a toll on me. I swung between extremes: not caring, caring too much, and wanting to fix everything that was out of control.

In all honesty, I mostly remember feeling numb. For two weeks, I put my own emotions on hold so that I

could kick into patient-care mode and ensure everything was properly handled. When my grandma passed, I don't think I even cried.

The emotions flooded back after her funeral, and I realized I couldn't keep putting myself through cycles of feeling numb and overwhelmed. Although caring for a family member was different from my studies and day job, I recognized that wasn't the first time I'd struggled to set healthy boundaries with those I was trying to help. I'd been serving others from an empty cup for years.

Nursing had been my dream job, but something had to change. It was time to follow a new path.

Reflections

Looking back, I remember observing a lot of great nurses who formed healthy boundaries with their patients. They cared deeply about their work and their patients, but they also knew when and how to separate so they could take care of themselves and their families when they got home.

That was never how I operated. Especially during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when family members weren't allowed in the hospital, I struggled to detach from my patients. I continued thinking about them after shifts, so I never had time to decompress.

I spent so much time caring for and thinking about others that I had no mental or emotional energy left to consider, much less fulfill, my own needs. It took a toll on my mental health, which is something I've struggled with from a young age.

When I was younger, I spent a lot of time ruminating on how I could make things easier for others, especially my parents. As an only child, I felt responsible for making things better whenever they had issues or didn't get along. It was hard to live with that pressure.

In 2017, the same year I started nursing school at Rasmussen University in Minnesota, I was diagnosed with severe depression and anxiety. I had a lot going on with my family then, and a close friend of mine had just died by suicide. Simply put, I cracked.

The confusing, or maybe contradictory, part of it all is that I found it easy to mask my pain by caring for others. It allowed me to keep busy and believe I was making another person's life a little bit easier when, really, I was also trying to avoid facing my feelings. In retrospect, I understand that coping in that way was hurting me, too.

Time for a Change

When I returned to work after my grandma's death, I was burned out. I finally understood that I couldn't form the boundaries I needed to continue working as a nurse. At the same time, I didn't know what else to do. I still wanted to help others, but I needed to find a job that would allow me to do so in a healthier way.

I spent about two months researching and asking myself what I really enjoyed doing. I was already self-taught in software development and was considering going that route when I discovered UX design, which uses research, data, and tests to create great digital experiences for all users.

I realized that it could be a fantastic way to employ my empathy, in addition to my knowledge and love of advancing tech-

nology, to help people — in a manner that wouldn't threaten my mental health.

I wouldn't face the constant anxiety I had felt as a nurse, caring for people whose health depended on me. And once the day ended, I would be able to step away, physically and emotionally, and focus more on myself and my needs.

By November 2020, at the age of 25, I was enrolled in an immersive UX boot camp through General Assembly, which took about three months. Shortly afterward, I completed an internship and landed my first job at T-Mobile, where I work on ways to improve digital assistance across T-Mobile's desktop and mobile experiences.

I aim to keep it accessible for everyone, thinking of my parents, Vietnamese immigrants who have lived in the United States for many years but still struggle with the language and navigating complex websites.

Self-Care as a Priority

It's been a little over two years since I decided to make the leap in my career, and I've been learning how to prioritize myself and my mental health. Self-care now means going to yoga or the gym most evenings after work, cooking a delicious meal for dinner, and spending some time on the couch watching Korean dramas.

I also spend time with my dog, Keopi; see friends on the weekend; and give back to my community through my work as a youth-group leader at my church. Working with a therapist has helped me process my emotions, dissect how my experiences as a child affect me today, and continue to explore and improve myself.

As for work, it feels great to be around coworkers who deeply care for others and advocate for inclusive experiences through UX design. I could see myself one day taking on the role of principal UX designer, specializing in inclusive and accessible designs.

And although nursing wasn't the path for me, I'm grateful for the lessons it taught me about myself. I will always have a tremendous amount of respect for those in patient care.

Jumping headfirst into a new career was one of the best decisions I've made, and it's helped me create the balance I need to support my mental health and make a difference, no matter how small that difference may be. 🌱

Mia's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

TRUST YOUR GUT.

"If something doesn't feel right, then trust your instinct that change is needed," says Mia.

2

TUNE IN TO YOURSELF.

"It's a constant cycle of really understanding what is working, what isn't working anymore, and what my body and mind are asking of me," she notes.

3

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO CHANGE.

Mia adds that she wouldn't be the UX designer she is now if not for her nursing experience.



TELL US YOUR STORY!

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



Mia with friends at the top of Rattlesnake Ledge near North Bend, Wash., in November 2021.



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LEADVILLE TRAIL 100 RUN AUG. 20

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CHICAGO TRIATHLON AUG. 28

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TURKEY DAY - CHICAGO NOV. 24

TURKEY DAY - MIAMI NOV. 24



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Your Sports Health Questions, Answered

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

MEET THE EXPERT



Sean Heffron, MD,
cardiologist and sports
health expert at
NYU Langone Health

Q: Can using caffeine lead to increased sports performance?

A: Caffeine is the most used psychoactive drug in the world, yet its efficacy in augmenting sports performance is highly debated. While some argue that caffeine is a performance-enhancing drug and should be banned, the research is so inconsistent that it's still allowed by sports agencies internationally.

"Caffeine is a chemical compound known as a methylxanthine," explains Dr. Sean Heffron, cardiologist and sports health expert at NYU Langone Health. It inhibits several adenosine receptors in the body, leading to the stimulation of the nervous system.

If you've ingested any type of caffeine, you've likely felt its effects: increased alertness, mental acuity, and concentration. This can lead to more effective, intense, and focused training bouts over longer durations of time.

More effective training leads to more effective sports performance. In this way, says Dr. Heffron, "Caffeine affects sports performance indirectly."

GAME-DAY BOOST?

Dr. Heffron recommends maintaining your regular caffeine routine on the day of a big event. "Use it as you would during training. If you normally have a cup of coffee in the morning, certainly have your cup. If you don't normally consume caffeine in the morning, don't drink three cups of coffee that morning." He stresses not introducing new variables right before or on the big day, and maintaining a proper eating, sleeping, and resting regimen.

Looking for a little boost during the event? Dr. Heffron recommends avoiding caffeine — unless you're used to it. Instead, he suggests reaching for something that supports hydration, such as a sports drink that contains carbohydrates, glucose, and water, especially during an endurance event.



CAFFEINE AND DEHYDRATION

It's long been thought that caffeine leads to dehydration. "Caffeine stimulates urination, which doesn't make for very effective hydration," says Dr. Heffron. But it's more nuanced than that.

Consuming caffeine won't always lead to dehydration, especially if lost fluids are properly replaced. It's the caffeine consumption in conjunction with insufficient hydration that leads to dehydration. "Dehydration can make someone's sports performance fail and mental acuity slump," Dr. Heffron notes.

Simply put, if you're not also drinking enough water, your caffeine consumption might not be doing much for your sports performance.

WHEN TO AVOID CAFFEINE

If you're an athlete using caffeine for sports performance, be sure to consider your unique health factors and talk with your healthcare provider.

Among those athletes who should limit or avoid caffeine, pregnant women are at the top of the list. If you're at risk for fractures and osteoporosis, you might also opt for skipping the stimulant.

Previously, it was thought that those who have abnormal heart rhythms should avoid the use of caffeine. "Now," Dr. Heffron explains, "the research suggests that caffeine leads to a reduced risk of arrhythmia." However, moderation is encouraged, as overdosing on caffeine can still lead to the occurrence of a cardiac arrhythmia.

SOME OPTIONS

Ready to replace your coffee or sports drink for a different caffeine supplement? Dr. Heffron explains that the caffeine itself "doesn't matter as much as the other ingredients those beverages deliver. Caffeine is caffeine is caffeine." Skip those laden with added sugars and multiple ingredients that stimulate the nervous system, such as ginseng, taurine, guarana, B vitamins, ginkgo biloba, and more.

For those looking to avoid caffeine altogether, Dr. Heffron suggests the following:

- **Peppermint:** This plant boosts energy.
- **Capsaicin:** This compound in spicy peppers can increase body temperature, stimulating your system.
- **Ginseng:** This herbal supplement can boost energy and help to improve focus and mental clarity.
- **Water:** This one is obvious, but many people are dehydrated and may not realize it.

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Real Fitness



Pickleball may have a funny name, but the sport's no joke — and neither is its booming popularity. In fact, it's the fastest-growing activity in the country.

Page
34

Build strength, speed, and agility to improve your pickleball game with our experts' tips.



Bust through a plateau and challenge your body and mind with this tempo-based workout.

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

Feeling stuck in your workout routine? Not seeing the results you expect? One of the most overlooked elements for busting through a strength plateau is tempo — the speed at which you perform a movement. Even a slight tweak to cadence can completely change the stimulus to your muscles, reengage your mind, and amp up your motivation to train.

“When someone isn’t seeing results, their first thought often is, *I should be doing more*. But more isn’t better — better is better,” says Life Time personal trainer and nutrition coach Lindsay Ogden, CPT. “Many times, it’s not a matter of what you should

add, but rather what you can change, to get the results you’re looking for.”

That’s where tempo training comes in. By optimally challenging the muscles through the different phases of a movement — think lifting, lowering, and pausing in between — it’s possible to shore up weaknesses and imbalances, and power through plateaus. (Learn more about this at ELmag.com/tempoworkout.)

In Fit + Focused, a complimentary six-week program Ogden designed to help Life Time members dial in their movement, nutrition, and mindset, tempo training is used as an effective way to introduce a novel challenge to body and mind.

Ogden shares the following upper-body strength workout, which incorporates pushing and pulling exercises performed at a tempo of slow eccentric (lowering) phases paired with explosive concentric (lifting) phases. After the strength block, fatigued — but not overworked — muscles are further challenged with a 15-minute conditioning AMRAP (as many reps as possible) that targets the upper body and core.

“I truly believe a quality program will have you feeling better than when you started,” Ogden says. “It will make you feel empowered and able to break through any plateaus — physically and mentally.”

The Workout

Life Time’s Lindsay Ogden designed the following upper-body workout, drawing from Fit + Focused programming.

Begin with a five- to 10-minute warm-up. Emphasize dynamic, low-resistance upper-body movements, like cross-body high pulls, scap pushups against a wall, and banded pass-throughs.

Next, move on to the strength routine. Perform three rounds of block 1, alternating between the exercises labeled A1 and A2; then perform three rounds of block 2, alternating between the exercises labeled B1 and B2. Avoid rushing through the movements, and follow the tempo notations:

The tempo note’s first digit is the duration, in seconds, of the eccentric (lowering) phase.

The second digit refers to the duration of the pause after you lower the weight.

The third digit describes the concentric (lifting) phase; “X” stands for “explosive.”

The fourth digit refers to the duration of the pause after you’ve completed the lift.

Block 1

A1 HAND-RELEASE PUSHUP

Reps: 10 to 12
Tempo: 31X1



Begin on your toes or on your knees, with hands under your shoulders.

Slowly lower yourself to the floor, then lift your hands only.

Push back up to the start position and repeat.

A2 GORILLA ROW

Reps: 10 to 12 per side
Tempo: 20X1



Stand with two weights between your feet, directly under your shoulders, and hinge back until you can grab them.

Row the weights one at a time, focusing on lowering them slowly. Keep your hips level. Alternate sides for the desired number of reps.

Block 2

B1 ALTERNATING CHEST PRESS

Reps: 10 to 12 per side
Tempo: 31X1



Begin lying back on a bench with two dumbbells pushed over your chest.

Slowly lower one dumbbell at a time while keeping the opposite arm extended. Alternate sides for the desired number of reps.

B2 RESISTANCE-BAND SEATED ROW

Reps: 10 to 12
Tempo: 20X1



Begin in a seated position with legs extended and a resistance band around your feet.

Pull both handles in toward your body, keeping your elbows close to your sides. Extend your arms, releasing the weight slowly, and repeat.

Then, move on to the conditioning circuit. Perform the exercises in order, completing as many rounds and good-form reps as you can in 15 minutes.

CONDITIONING CIRCUIT

AMRAP

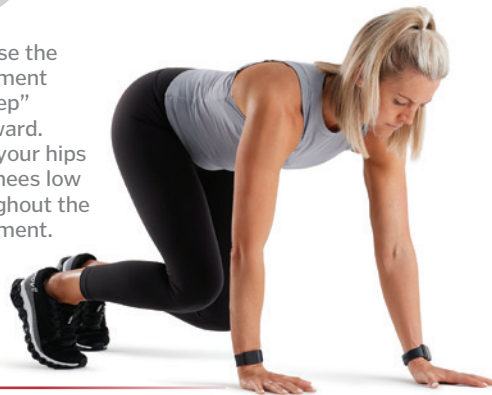
BEAR CRAWL FORWARD X 30 STEPS

From an all-fours position, raise your knees off the floor and “step” forward, moving opposite hand and foot.



BEAR CRAWL BACKWARD X 30 STEPS

Reverse the movement to “step” backward. Keep your hips and knees low throughout the movement.



CLEAN AND PUSH PRESS X 15 REPS

Using power from your hips, explosively raise a set of dumbbells from shin height to shoulders, and from shoulders to overhead.



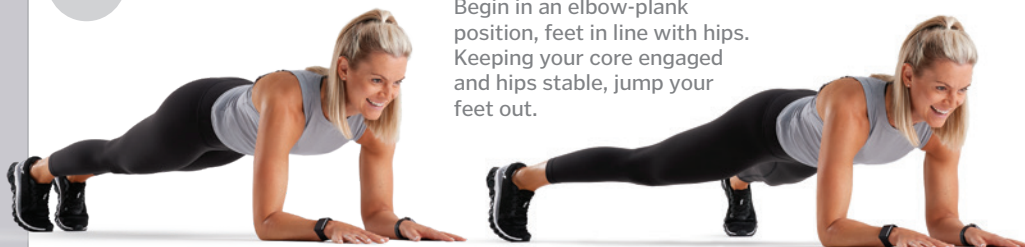
ALTERNATING WOODCHOP X 10 REPS PER SIDE

Using power from your hips, explosively raise a dumbbell diagonally, from the outside of one foot up, across, and beyond the opposite shoulder.



PLANK JACKS X 30 REPS

Begin in an elbow-plank position, feet in line with hips. Keeping your core engaged and hips stable, jump your feet out.



With control, jump your feet back in to the starting position and repeat.

GET THE DETAILS

For detailed warm-up, exercise, and cool-down instructions, visit ELmag.com/fitfocused.



Finally, take at least five minutes to cool down. Focus on bringing your heart rate and breathing back to normal.

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

The One-Minute Brain Break

As little as one minute of movement can refresh your mind and body and turn your day around.

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

Conventional wisdom tells us that exercise counts only if we do it for a minimum of 30 minutes. And if you don't have that much time? Then it's not worth getting up from your desk or couch, right?

"Wrong," says resiliency expert and personal trainer Jenny Evans, CPT.

"We're told 'go big or go home.' As a society, we underestimate the power of small, especially when it comes to change," argues

Evans, author of *The Resiliency rEvolution* and creator of the workout card game *Hit the Deck*. "In reality, small efforts adding up over time is how big change actually happens."

On a neurological level, brief bouts of exercise have been shown to improve our ability to process information, maintain focus, store and recall memories, solve problems, make decisions, and even tap into our creativity.

"Microbursts," as Evans calls them, are also effective at releasing the neurotransmitters serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine, helping to regulate our mood, fine-tune our attention, and enhance our learning skills.

Physiologically, as little as one minute of moving around improves circulation, carrying energy in the form of oxygen and glucose throughout the body.

"Get up and move for a few minutes at least once every hour, if not more," suggests Evans. "It doesn't have to be anything crazy. Go grab a drink of water. Go do a quick task in another part of the house or office."

For a quick burst of intensity, pick one of the following six moves and perform it for one minute. Start with one minute a day and work your way up to one minute every hour you spend sitting. ➔

SQUAT



STANDING KNEE RAISE



HANDS-ELEVATED PUSHUP



BOB AND WEAVE



ALTERNATING LUNGE



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



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The TRX Pull-Up

Break free of the pull-up bar and build strength with this alternative upper-body move.

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

The pull-up is one of the most effective upper-body pulling exercises, but the conventional bar method is inaccessible for many people. TRX pull-ups are a great alternative.

Suspension trainers are not designed to support a full pull-up, but there are several ways they can be used to diversify a training routine and break through plateaus.

What makes the TRX pull-up so special? For one, TRX handles are not fixed in place like a pull-up bar, so they allow your shoulders to move more comfortably through their full range of motion. Additionally, the adjustable strap length allows you to use your feet to support your weight as you build strength.

Many people fall prey to the mistake of angling the body back to face the anchor, thereby performing a more horizontal pulling motion. With pull-ups of any variation, it's important to move straight up and down, pulling vertically.

Make sure to position yourself with the TRX directly overhead. Because



your feet will be supported by the floor or an elevated surface, adjust the TRX straps so handles are at a height that allows you to sit with your arms fully extended overhead.

INSTRUCTIONS

1

Anchor the TRX securely overhead, with the straps hanging straight down. Sit on the floor beneath the straps and extend your arms to grasp the handles. Your knees can be bent or extended — the farther your feet are from your hips, the more difficult the move will be.

2

Engage your scapulas, core, and glutes, then use your lats to pull your elbows down to your sides. Push through your feet as needed.

3

Pull until your chin clears the height of the handles, then lower yourself with control to return to the starting position. Repeat for three sets of eight to 12 repetitions or the desired number of reps.

+

PROGRESS YOUR PULL-UP

Increase the difficulty of the TRX pull-up with the two variations at ELmag.com/trxpullup.

WELCOME TO THE

PICKLEDOME

Get to know the basic rules and techniques of pickleball — and the sport's unique lingo, too.

BY SARAH TUFF

It may have a funny name, but pickleball is no joke. In fact, it's the fastest-growing activity in the country. According to a 2022 report, the Sports and Fitness Industry Association estimates that 4.8 million Americans play the sport. That number grew by 39.3 percent during the pandemic, beating out all other U.S. sports.

"The sport of pickleball is derived from tennis, badminton, and Ping-Pong," explains Katie Easter, pickleball lead for Life Time's Bloomington North club in Minnesota. "The people are diverse in age, gender, and ethnicity. You can walk onto the pickleball court with any kind of court experience — or none at all — and learn the game pretty easily."

Ajay Pant, Life Time's senior director of racquet sports, admits he was "quite skeptical" about the popular sport, but he quickly became a convert. "I played once and got addicted — and this addiction is the norm, not an aberration."

Pickleball can indeed become a lifestyle, says Laura Gainor of USA Pickleball. "Once you start, you typically quickly become addicted because of its fun and social nature. It has a multigenerational appeal for people of all skill levels to be able to play together, so many families over the past couple of years have used it to stay active and healthy together, either playing in their driveway or on local community courts."

One family that's taken it to another level is the duo of Leigh Waters and her daughter, Anna Leigh Waters, who started playing pickleball in 2017 and soon began winning local tournaments in Florida. Anna Leigh went pro at age 12, becoming the youngest professional pickleball player in the world. Now 15, she's still dominating the circuit.

"What drew us to the sport was the fact that we could play with our family of all ages and abilities. It was something fun that

we could all do together," says Leigh Waters. "The sport is so inclusive and so social. People line up at the parks every morning to play together and have a great time."

But it's not only fun, social, and family-friendly. "Pickleball is a full-body cardiovascular workout," says Pant. "It burns 40 percent more calories than walking — while still being very low-impact on your knees and your lower back."

To make the most of your time on the court, get ready for a match with a dynamic warm-up. (For a full warm-up, see [ELmag.com/dynamicwarmup](https://www.ELmag.com/dynamicwarmup).)

And when playing, stay light on your feet. Pro pickleballer Catherine Parenteau recommends doing simple mobility exercises to improve your court coverage.

The Waters family and other expert picklers offer a few insider tips and tricks for enhancing your game — and your enjoyment of the sport.



LEARN THE LINGO

It's probably no surprise that a game with a name like "pickleball" comes with some unique vernacular. Here's a short list of important terminology.

THE KITCHEN: Another term for the nonvolley zone, the section of court adjacent to the net

VOLLEY LLAMA: An illegal move where a player hits a volley shot in the kitchen

PICKLEDOME: The court where a tournament's championship match is played

READY, SET, PLAY!

Practice Your Dink Shot

A dink shot is a soft return hit on a bounce from the nonvolley zone, intended to arc over the net and land within the opposing nonvolley zone, either straight across or diagonally crosscourt. An effective dink arcs downward as it crosses the net, creating a more difficult shot to return than a power shot.

"Good pickleball is about touch and soft hands while dinking in the kitchen area," says Pant. "It's cat and mouse with your opponent. Dinking is a game of attrition. If you can keep the ball low and short enough times, your opponent will probably make a mistake!"

Practice dinking every time you play, he suggests. Simply start out with only dink shots with your partner, and practice all patterns — forehand to forehand, forehand to backhand, backhand to backhand.

Arc Your Third Shot Drop

The third shot drop is a drop shot that comes after the serve and return. By arcing the ball and landing it into your opponent's kitchen, or nonvolley zone, you give your team time to get to the net, which improves your chances of winning the rally.

"When you serve, because of the two-bounce rule, you start at a disadvantage since your opponent can rush the net," says Pant. (The two-bounce rule requires the receiving team to let the ball bounce once before returning it and requires the serving team to let the ball bounce before hitting the third shot. After the two bounces, the ball can be hit out of the air.) "If you float the third shot, your opponent will punish you with a volley," he explains.

Practice dinking this third shot with a partner. A dink shot will ensure that the ball stays low, making it harder for your opponent to volley down. A successful dink as your third shot also gives you time to creep up to the kitchen and challenge your opponent.

Call the Score

"One of the most difficult things for many people to learn is how to call the score," says David Huntley, an Atlanta-based professional pickleball coach. Three numbers are called; a typical score may be called 5-6-2. This means the serving team's score is 5, the returning team's score is 6, and the third number is always 1 or 2 — based on whether the team's first or second server is about to serve.

"Another thing about the scoring that can be confusing is that you can only get a point when you are the serving team," says Huntley. "When you 'win a point' while the other team is serving, you do not get a point; you only get the serve back to your team." (In doubles, you get the serve back only after both opponents have served and faulted.)

Calm Your Nerves

"One of the questions we get the most from pickleball players across the board is what to do when you get nervous or start to feel uncomfortable on the court during play," says Leigh Waters. "Take deep breaths, watch the ball, and keep your feet moving. This will help your body to relax and give your mind something to focus on other than the fact that you're nervous!" 🎾

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



THE SPORT IS SO INCLUSIVE AND SO SOCIAL. PEOPLE LINE UP AT THE PARKS EVERY MORNING TO PLAY TOGETHER AND HAVE A GREAT TIME."



COVER THE COURT

For six agility drills from pickleballer Catherine Parenteau, visit ELmag.com/pickleballdrills.



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From Mean Girl to Cheerleader

How our fitness editor gave up her reliance on negative self-talk to push through workouts without compromising her fitness.



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

On anyone's fitness journey, there are all sorts of transformations that might occur. Aesthetic changes such as fat loss, muscle gain, and improved posture often get the most attention, likely because they tend to be easier to see. But they're only part of the story.

Fitness pursuits can lead to numerous less-visible changes — in internal health, athletic performance, and social connections, as well as in neurological and psychological markers. These types of benefits, I've learned, are overlapping, multidimensional, and endless.

One of the more interesting transformations I've noticed is the change in my self-talk since I was a girl of 11 who believed that the only worthwhile goal was to get skinny. Back then, my internal voice was that of the Mean Girl. I bullied myself as a means of motivation.

This style of negative self-talk began to shift when, in my 20s, I started training for performance. I ran 5Ks and half-marathons, and I began lifting weights to find out how strong I could get. In this stage, my inner Mean Girl took the back seat as my inner Drill Sergeant appeared to take the wheel — and refused to take “no” or “I can’t” for an answer.

Although Mean Girl still chimed in occasionally (she was the worst sort of back-seat driver), her voice gradually quieted as Drill Sergeant pushed my limits. I got stronger and fitter than I'd ever been.

But working out so hard for so long had negative consequences, too. Demanding and rigorous, this

all-or-nothing approach took its toll on my psyche — and on my body. My progress flatlined.

Eventually, Drill Sergeant moved to the back seat and made way for a new driver: my inner Cheerleader.

Although the previous personifications of my inner voice had emerged organically, Cheerleader surfaced as a result of my intentional cultivation and my need to drown out the inner critics. I required a voice that was loud, excited, and supportive.

Kindness, I've learned, isn't coddling — it's caring.

And showing myself care is what helps me truly thrive.

I practiced positive self-talk, meditated on encouraging mantras, and plastered my workspace and journal with affirmations. My workouts became a time and space where only good thoughts and good words were permitted.

These efforts were my attempt to adopt a fake-it-till-you-make-it attitude. I felt a strong need to be kind to myself, regarding my body and fitness or other things and situations, and I showered myself with positive messaging inside and out.

It was hard. My inner critics still spat venom from the backseat. But I finally began to be able to hear how that harshness was reflected all around me: in friends and workout buddies who motivated themselves with negative self-talk, and in popular media, which promoted the same sort of cruelty.

But the more aware I became of how hard I had to fight to hear the Cheerleader's voice, the louder and stronger that part of me became.

My preteen self suspected kindness was coddling, and coddling would lead to weakness — that the only way to reach my fitness goals (or any goals) was to be my own worst critic. Yet real life hadn't proved any of that to be true. Progress was possible without punishment.

This inner-voice transformation was more than two decades in the making. In hindsight, my awareness of it came largely thanks to intentional self-reflection.

Lately, I've been reflecting on whether Cheerleader is still my predominant voice. I've been paying attention to my inner monologue during workouts. And it seems that although Cheerleader is still there, she's in the back seat now, too, keeping Mean Girl and Drill Sergeant company.

So who is in the driver's seat? I don't know what to call her yet. There's something maternal, even grandmotherly, about the way I talk to myself now. Yes, sometimes I can still be mean, or pushy, or full-on rah-rah. But the prevailing voice is kind and understanding.

Kindness, I've learned, isn't coddling — it's caring. And showing myself care is what helps me truly thrive.



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

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Find our recipe for Autumn Cobb Salad at ELmag.com/seasonalsalads.



Sleep-Supportive Nutrients

A host of supplements — think melatonin, magnesium, and more — can help you drift off and sleep more soundly. And they're typically safer than pharmaceuticals.

BY **MO PERRY**

Sleep can be tough to come by these days. A 2021 systematic review of 44 studies, which involved more than 54,000 participants in 13 countries (including the United States), found that 36 percent of subjects were experiencing problems falling or staying asleep.

Even before the stressful events of 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that around one in 25 American adults had used a prescription sleep aid in the past month.

And a survey of older adults published in 2018 found that more than a third of them used medications to aid sleep — most commonly, over-the-counter (OTC) sleep aids.

Prescription and OTC sleep aids often come with side effects, including daytime drowsiness, headaches, memory problems, gut disturbances, and dizziness. A 2017 study published in the journal *Sleep* reported that such medications increase the risk of falls for older adults.

Other research suggests that long-term use of sedatives and hypnotics, such as Ambien (zolpidem), can double the risk of dementia.

Such pharmaceutical and OTC sleep aids also carry the risk of both physical and psychological dependence. Over time, higher doses are usually needed, and stopping the drug can trigger anxiety, agitation, restlessness, and other psychological symptoms.

Yet there is good news for the sleep-challenged: Conventional sleep aids are not the only option. There are supplemental nutrients that can also help.

“When we think about what we need to have good sleep, they’re things we get from food,” explains functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN. “Nutrients run the body.”

These include the vitamins, minerals, and electrolytes our bodies use to create sleep-promoting neurochemicals, such as melatonin, serotonin, and GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid).

A nutrient-first approach to sleep tends to circumvent the side effects of sleep drugs. Meet some of the star sleep-supporting nutrients.

Melatonin

Melatonin is a hormone primarily made by the pineal gland in the brain, although some is also produced in the gut. As the sun sets and darkness falls, the hypothalamus signals the gland to ramp up melatonin production. In turn, the hormone sends a clear signal to the brain and body to get ready for sleep.

You can find melatonin in many pharmacies alongside other sleep aids, but it doesn't operate in the same way as those that offer sedation. "A common misconception people have is that melatonin is a sedative that will put you to sleep," says Lindsay Christensen, MS, CNS, LDN, a functional nutritionist in Conifer, Colo.

In fact, melatonin serves to regulate the body's sleep-wake cycle and circadian rhythms, she explains. That means if someone's sleep problems are related to stress or cortisol levels instead of a disrupted circadian rhythm, melatonin probably won't help. (For more on circadian health, see [ELmag.com/circadian](https://www.elmag.com/circadian).)

"Think of sleep as the Olympic 100-meter race," suggests neuroscientist Matthew Walker, PhD, in his book *Why We Sleep*. "Melatonin is the voice of the timing official that says, 'Runners, on your mark,' and then fires the starting pistol." Melatonin governs when the race begins, but the runners are "other brain regions and processes that actively generate sleep."

To make melatonin, the body first converts tryptophan into the mood-regulating neurotransmitter serotonin; serotonin is then converted into melatonin. "Melatonin is the end product of a long-chain chemical reaction," Haas explains.

We have to get tryptophan from food. Sources include leafy greens, sunflower seeds, eggs, cheese, fish, and, famously, turkey (which many credit with their need for a postdinner nap on Thanksgiving).

While melatonin is best known for its capacity to help with sleep, it also supports other functions. "Melatonin is a potent antioxidant," says Haas, noting that it's sometimes used in holistic cancer treatment to



reduce side effects from radiation and chemotherapy.

It also, somewhat mysteriously, may help treat acid reflux. And it's been shown to ease the symptoms of acute COVID-19 (and may benefit those with long COVID as well) — possibly because of its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and immune-modulating effects.

WHOLE-FOOD SOURCES: Nuts, milk, fish, eggs, and goji berries all contain melatonin. Tart cherries are one of the most potent sources, and drinking tart-cherry juice has been found to improve sleep. Kiwifruit, meanwhile, is a great source of food-based serotonin — an important ingredient in the melatonin-production cycle.

SUPPLEMENTS: Melatonin supplements are safe and well-tolerated by most people. Still, relying on them for the long term may disrupt the body's melatonin-producing pathway. And if melatonin drops off, rebound wakefulness can occur.

Supplements may be best used to adjust the timing of the sleep-wake

cycle. They can be particularly helpful for shift workers or international travelers whose circadian rhythms need a nudge, says nutritionist Karman Meyer, RD, LDN, author of *Eat to Sleep*.

Taking 1 to 3 mg of melatonin about an hour before bedtime can signal to the body that it's time to wind down. (You can also experiment to find timing that's right for you — some people do better taking melatonin about 30 minutes before bed.)

"Melatonin is great in the short term — it's a great way to get over the hump of jet lag," Meyer says. "If you're trying to establish a regular sleep pattern, some people might use it for up to two years. But for most, it's more like a month or two." She notes that long-term use can sometimes lead to headaches, grogginess, depression, or dizziness.

Although supplementing is a useful tool, most experts suggest that the goal is to support the body's ability to produce its own melatonin. "As with digestive enzymes or acids, we can take these things supplementally for a period of time to regulate the mechanisms those compounds support, but we ultimately want the body to make them," Haas says.



CBD FOR SLEEP

Research on CBD (cannabidiol), a cannabinoid found in both hemp and marijuana, as a sleep aid has produced mixed results. Part of the reason, says functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN, is that "CBD is all over the map in terms of sourcing, dose, and potency."

CBD does show consistently promising results in reducing anxiety, and this may be one reason it helps with sleep. "CBD may provide a calming effect," says Karman Meyer, RD, LDN, author of *Eat to Sleep*.

Studies show CBD can enhance the binding power of the body's receptors for GABA, the relaxing neurotransmitter, and that it may increase available levels of tryptophan, which the body uses to make serotonin and melatonin. (For more on CBD, see [ELmag.com/cbd](https://www.elmag.com/cbd).)

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is key to the body's ability to create melatonin, notes Christensen. Many of her clients use sleep trackers, and they've found that when their vitamin D levels improve — whether through sun exposure or supplementation — their feedback will often show a significant improvement in their sleep quality.

Recent research corroborates Christensen's findings. A 2018 meta-analysis found that levels of vitamin D lower than 20 ng/mL (nanograms per milliliter) were associated with a 60 percent greater risk of poor sleep.

And in a randomized controlled trial published in 2017, participants with sleep disorders reported significant improvements in several measures of sleep after taking a megadose of 50,000 IUs of vitamin D3 every other week for eight weeks.

This may all be traced back to inflammation, suggests Meyer. "Lack of vitamin D can lead to an increase in inflammatory substances in the body that can interfere with sleep processes."

Emerging evidence suggests that vitamin D may enhance immune health by limiting the release of inflammatory substances, such as prostaglandin D2, tumor necrosis factor alpha, and cytokines. Other research has shown a correlation between a well-regulated immune system and quality sleep.

WHOLE-FOOD SOURCES: Daily exposure to sunshine is the best way to get vitamin D. Egg yolks, wild salmon, sardines (with skin and bones), and mushrooms that have been treated with UV light (look for a label stating this) are among the few food sources for this important vitamin. Note that mushrooms supply vitamin D2, whereas sunlight and animal foods supply D3; the latter more effectively raises serum levels of vitamin D. (For more on this nutrient, see ELmag.com/vitaminD.)

SUPPLEMENTS: Vitamin D3 supplements are extremely helpful for those living at latitudes where there is less sunlight in winter.



Calcium

Calcium supports sleep in two ways. First, it helps the body convert tryptophan into melatonin. Dairy products, which contain both tryptophan and calcium, are among the most sleep-promoting of all foods. A warm glass of milk at bedtime is a cliché for a reason.

Secondly, calcium — along with zinc, copper, and magnesium — supports the signaling process that governs the sleep-wake cycle. Haas calls these nutrients gatekeepers that "let information in and out of cells and move brain chemicals around."

As with vitamin D, research has found that low calcium intake is associated with insomnia and poor sleep, particularly disturbances in REM sleep, where dreaming and memory formation take place.

WHOLE-FOOD SOURCES: Good sources of calcium include kale, sardines with bones, tofu, yogurt, edamame, figs, almonds, and cottage cheese.

SUPPLEMENTS: Calcium-citrate supplements offer a potentially more bioavailable option for getting this nutrient; these often combine calcium with another sleep-supportive nutrient — magnesium. (For more on wise ways to supplement calcium, and how to best combine it with other nutrients, see ELmag.com/calcium.)



HERBS FOR SLEEP

Several herbs are renowned for their sleep-supporting properties. Passionflower and valerian root may enhance GABA, the neurotransmitter that calms the central nervous system.

Valerian may also produce a sedative effect, particularly when used in combination with other calming herbs, says Karman Meyer, RD, LDN.

"Some research shows a synergistic effect between valerian root and lemon balm, so it's good to have these together."

Lavender, chamomile, and hops also have a calming effect on the nervous system and can help induce sleep, says functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN. Many of these can be found in tea blends marketed to help with sleep, which are a great remedy for occasional sleep disruption. For chronic issues, try a concentrated extract; these can provide a standardized dose of specific sleep-promoting herbs.

Adaptogenic herbs, such as maca, tulsi (holy basil), and Panax ginseng (also known as red ginseng), offer other routes to aid sleep, Haas notes. These are not sedating, so they're not taken at bedtime — instead they offer a slow course-correction for the body. "Adaptogens are useful when we're thinking about a long-term macro impact on the nervous system." (For more on adaptogens, see ELmag.com/adaptogens.)

Magnesium

In addition to supporting melatonin synthesis, magnesium helps regulate stress hormones, making it a good choice if melatonin doesn't seem to work for you. "Magnesium can help reduce cortisol, the stress hormone, which can spike at night," explains Christensen.

In a healthy cortisol cycle, the hormone rises in the morning and declines gently throughout the day. But if you've awakened in the middle of the night with a spinning, anxious mind, you may have a disrupted cortisol cycle to thank. "Optimizing magnesium intake in the evening can downregulate cortisol production." (For more on optimal cortisol timing, see ELmag.com/cortisolcurve.)

This mineral may regulate other hormones as well, Christensen notes. Magnesium and calcium help metabolize estrogen, which may help address the hormone-related sleep disturbances that are a hallmark of perimenopause and menopause.

Magnesium is also needed for relaxation, Meyer adds. "It can

help prevent migraines, menstrual cramping, muscle contractions — those things that are enough all by themselves to wake you up in the middle of the night." It also stimulates the brain's receptors for GABA, a calming neurotransmitter.

One small 2012 randomized clinical trial found that daily magnesium supplements helped relieve insomnia in elderly subjects; the participants also showed improvements in their melatonin and cortisol levels. Another study using animal subjects found that a magnesium-deficient diet was correlated with light, restless sleep.



WHOLE-FOOD SOURCES: Because of declining soil health, magnesium is increasingly difficult to get from food, says Haas. "It's disappearing from our food system as a side effect of conventional agricultural practices." Still, pumpkinseeds, almonds, cashews, black beans, brown rice, and edamame are all good sources of magnesium if the soil in which they're grown is nutrient dense.

SUPPLEMENTS: As far as magnesium supplements for sleep are concerned, the Cleveland Clinic advises opting for magnesium glycinate (200 mg) or magnesium citrate (200 mg) about 30 minutes before bedtime. Avoid magnesium oxide, which is primarily a stool softener.

Probiotics

The gut microbiome is involved in nearly every aspect of our health, including melatonin production. "Melatonin is primarily made in the brain but also in the gut," says Christensen. "If the bacterial ratios in the gut are imbalanced, then gut-derived melatonin could be lower, which could affect sleep."

Some gut microbes also help make calming neurotransmitters, such as GABA. "If we have low levels of those GABA-producing bacteria, we can be less able to wind down," she adds.

Poor digestion, meanwhile, can contribute to irritability, diarrhea, constipation, and moodiness — conditions that by themselves can disrupt good sleep. "And with poor gut health, you're not absorbing nutrients well," Meyer says. This can lead to trouble getting the calcium, magnesium, and other nutrients you need.

WHOLE-FOOD SOURCES: To support a healthy microbiome, Christensen recommends, limit processed foods and eat a diet rich in prebiotics — foods that feed good bacteria in the gut. These include Jerusalem artichokes, asparagus, lentils, unripe bananas, leeks, oats, and chickpeas. Probiotic fermented foods, such as yogurt and pickled vegetables, can also be a great source of beneficial bacteria.

SUPPLEMENTS: A daily probiotic can lend extra support. (For tips on how to find a quality probiotic, see ELmag.com/probioticsupplements.)



SLEEP SUPPORT FOR KIDS

Sleep supplements, including herbal remedies, may be too potent for kids, says functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN. "We want to find gentle interventions for those little bodies."

She recommends trying sleep teas with calming herbs, such as chamomile or lavender, or using lavender essential oil in a diffuser. A bedtime bath with Epsom salts can be relaxing for kids too, she adds; the magnesium in them may also be absorbed through the skin.

UNDERSTANDING **FOOD** **JUSTICE**

Why access to fresh, healthy food should be a basic human right.





BY LOLA MÉNDEZ

It started with a vegetable garden. Ron Finley planted the seeds on the parkway, the strip of land between the sidewalk and the street, in front of his home in South Central Los Angeles. His goal was to offer the resulting produce free of charge in his neighborhood, where most other food came from drive-thru windows and convenience-store shelves.

City officials vowed to halt Finley's self-described gangsta gardening. But eventually, with the support of community members and other activists, he convinced council members to change the law instead. Since then, the Ron Finley Project has only grown.

Food deserts aren't unique to South Central LA. The U.S. food system delivers plenty of inexpensive processed food while limiting access to affordable fresh produce. In the long run, the negative effects of cheap processed foods are myriad, including higher rates of heart disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes.

These issues fuel the food-justice movement, which considers access to healthy food a human right and demands a paradigm shift to end food-related inequities.

To understand food justice, we first must acknowledge that we're all currently participating in a food system that leaves many people sick, hungry, and malnourished. But we have the power to change it.

To understand food justice, we first must acknowledge that we're all currently participating in a food system that leaves many people sick, hungry, and malnourished. **But we have the power to change it.**

A just food future includes providing access to fresh produce, supporting workers' rights, leveraging food sovereignty, and adopting regenerative agriculture to create a future of sustainable farming.

Increasing Access

The United States is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, yet a 2020 study found that 44 percent of low-income adults were food insecure, meaning they lacked consistent, reliable access to affordable, nutritious food. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has shown that a lack of healthy food puts low-income communities of color at greater risk during a public-health crisis.

One aim of the food-justice movement is to eliminate food disparities. But the focus also falls on the architecture of injustice that keeps working-class families perpetually food insecure.

"The United States was founded on a food system that relied on the work of enslaved people and the theft of land from Indigenous communities," explains Raj Patel, author

"What we're dealing with right now is food injustice," explains Ron Finley, the "Gangsta Gardener" of South Central Los Angeles.

of *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System*.

Systemic racism created communities like Finley's in South Central, where healthy whole foods are largely inaccessible. According to the USDA's most recent report, some 19 million Americans live in these food deserts.

New York City community activist Karen Washington refers to the discriminatory policies that limit marginalized communities' ability to purchase fresh foods as food apartheid.

"These communities need affordable housing, rent control, and single-payer healthcare," Patel argues. These interventions would allow people suffering from food apartheid to spend more of their budget on healthy foods.

President Obama's 2016 Global Food Security Act (GFSa) was landmark legislation recognizing the need for food security worldwide. The law guarantees funding for food-security investments, specifically for small-scale producers and female farmers.

GFSa also supports the global Feed the Future (FTF) initiative, which works with farmers to improve agricultural practices, strengthen communities, and increase income. FTF estimates it has helped 23.4 million people rise above the poverty line and has helped lift 5.2 million families out of hunger.

Supporting Farmworkers' Rights

The U.S. government offers little labor protection for farmworkers, who play a critical role in the food-system infrastructure. As a result, farmworkers are more vulnerable to wage theft and earn some of the lowest wages of the labor force.

"Farmers depend on migrant labor and the hands of communities of people of color but don't want to pay for it," Patel says. "The food system has always depended on workers being underpaid." Farmworkers also endure hazardous working conditions: exposure to pesticides, risk of heatstroke, and more.

"The housing provided can be substandard. There are instances of antibiotics given to animals being stored in refrigerators workers use to store their food," says Brian DeVore of the Minnesota-based Land Stewardship Project. "With climate change, conditions are becoming brutal for workers in the heat. We've got to give people breaks, shade, and plenty of hydration."

In 2019, New York state passed the Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act, which went into effect in 2020. It guarantees farmworkers the right to collectively bargain and receive essential benefits. Other states have proposed similar legislation.

And, in 2021, Long Island's Pindar Vineyards became the state's first agricultural workplace to unionize, with the goal of improving working conditions and offering access to healthcare and retirement funds.

Backing Food Sovereignty

While the corporate-centric food system is profit oriented, food sovereignty requires recognizing that food is not a commodity but a human right. Brooke Bridges, food-justice assistant manager of Soul Fire Farm (SFF), explains that food sovereignty doesn't center on corporations or change according to market forces. "It provides food for the community needs at the discretion of the community."

Located in Petersburg, N.Y., SFF offers the majority of its harvest to those living under food apartheid in the Capital Region of upstate New

York. It also works to seed food sovereignty in its community through Afro-Indigenous farming workshops, which train food-justice activists in agricultural skills.

"Community control is essential for folks to get back to their ancestries," Bridges says. (For more on SFF's work, see ELmag.com/SFF.)

Food sovereignty also aims to build localized systems to help consumers become less dependent on corporations. For SFF, that means supporting Black, Brown, and Indigenous land ownership so those communities can grow and raise their own food. SFF offers a week-long immersion program to support Black, Indigenous, and Latinx growers.

It also works with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives on the Braiding Seeds Fellowship, which provides mentorship and stipends to new farmers "to support their livelihood on the land."

Going Regenerative

Regenerative agriculture is an integrated approach to sustainable farming that promotes soil health and enables the soil to sequester carbon. DeVore, author of *Wildly Successful Farming: Sustainability and the New Agricultural Land Ethic*, observes that climate change is making soil health more crucial than ever, because healthy soil also means improved water quality and increased resiliency in the face of extreme weather. (For more on regenerative agriculture, see ELmag.com/regenerativeag.)

In Marine on St. Croix, Minn., Big River Farms teaches farmers of color about regenerative agriculture through organic-farming practices, cover cropping, and creating pollinator habitats.

Students of Finley's gardening MasterClass also use regenerative methods in their gardens. "People are setting their sights on being free by growing food," Finley says. "They see the power in detaching from a system that oppresses you." 🌱



People are setting their sights on being free by growing food. They see the power in detaching from a system that oppresses you."

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

The flaws in our food system can feel overwhelming, but we can each play a role in helping to build a more just food future for all. These are some things you can do:

- **Make financial donations**, or even gifts of land, to food-justice organizations led by Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. This may be the most actionable way to create food justice.
- **Join a CSA** (community-supported agriculture) program to bolster a farm. (For more on CSAs, see ELmag.com/csa.)
- **Volunteer at a food bank**, share seeds with low-income land cooperatives, or participate in community gardens that give produce boxes to people in need.
- **Support politicians** dedicated to protecting farmworkers and eliminating food insecurity.

LOLA MÉNDEZ is a freelance journalist writing about food, sustainability, and travel.



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Stellar Salads

These recipes build on seasonal produce to create hearty, flavorful salads you'll look forward to eating.

BY **ROBIN ASBELL**

The sad side salad has got to go. You know the one: a little bowl of pale lettuce, some dry grated carrot, maybe a wedge of out-of-season tomato. It's watery and flavorless, exuding little joy at all.

A good salad can offer a symphony of flavors and textures when composed with a creative mix of fresh ingredients. Add a zingy dressing made with whole-food ingredients, and your salad will really start to sing.

These recipes are all about the seasonal produce. As the weather cools, set lettuce aside and dig into heartier greens like radicchio, spinach, collards, and cabbage. Toppings like steamed or roasted veggies, cooked whole grains or legumes, and toasted nuts or seeds will give your salad more staying power.

Leave those sad, soggy salads behind and explore the joy of vibrant, flavorful options you'll truly enjoy eating.



Smoked Fish and Napa Cabbage Salad

Makes four servings
Prep time: 20 minutes

DRESSING:

- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tbs. grated fresh ginger
- 2 tbs. unseasoned rice vinegar
- 1 tbs. honey
- 3 tbs. avocado oil (or other neutral oil)
- 1 tbs. toasted sesame oil
- 1 tsp. sriracha sauce

SALAD:

- 8 oz. hot-smoked trout, salmon, or whitefish (bones removed)
- 4 cups thinly sliced napa cabbage
- 4 ribs celery, sliced diagonally
- 1 small red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 4 scallions, sliced diagonally

Combine all the dressing ingredients in a jar and shake well to blend.

Cut the fish into bite-sized pieces. Spread the cabbage on a large platter or four plates, then top with the celery, red pepper, scallions, and fish. Drizzle with dressing and serve.

Roasted Fennel and French Lentil Salad

Makes four servings
Prep time: 60 minutes

DRESSING:

- ½ cup full-fat plain yogurt (not Greek)
- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp. lime zest
- 1 tbs. lime juice
- ½ tsp. chipotle chili powder
- ½ tsp. sea salt

SALAD:

- 2 cups water
- ½ cup French (or Puy) lentils, rinsed and drained
- ¼ tsp. sea salt
- 1 head garlic
- 3 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 large fennel bulbs, cubed (about 4 cups)
- ½ cup raw pepitas
- 2 large Bosc pears
- 1 tsp. lime juice
- 4 cups spinach
- 4 oz. feta cheese, crumbled

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Combine all the dressing ingredients in a jar and shake well to blend.

Bring the water, lentils, and salt to a boil in a small pot. Reduce the heat and simmer for about 20 minutes, until the lentils are tender but still keep their shape. Drain and let cool.

Cut off the top of the head of garlic to expose the cloves. Place the head of garlic on a square of aluminum foil and drizzle with 1 teaspoon of the olive oil. Wrap the foil around the garlic and place in one corner of a large baking sheet.

Place the cubed fennel on the same baking sheet. Drizzle with 2 teaspoons of the olive oil and toss to coat. Roast for 20 minutes, then stir the fennel well

and roast for 10 minutes longer, until it's browned in spots and very soft and the garlic is tender when pierced with a fork. Let cool.

Place the pepitas in a small skillet over medium-high heat. Stir the seeds until they start to pop and turn golden brown, about three to five minutes. Transfer to a bowl and let cool.

Cut the pears into long, thin slices and place in a small bowl. Drizzle with 1 teaspoon of lime juice and toss to coat.

Spread the spinach on a large platter or four plates, then top with the fennel, lentils, pears, and feta. Unwrap the head of garlic and squeeze the roasted cloves out of the bulb, then distribute on top of the salad. Drizzle with dressing, sprinkle with pepitas, and serve.





Collard Salad With Broccoli and Butternut Squash

Makes four servings
Prep time: 45 minutes

DRESSING:

- 4 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbs. apple-cider vinegar
- 1 tbs. honey
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ tsp. sea salt

SALAD:

- 2 cups water
- ½ cup semi-pearled farro, rinsed and drained
- ¾ tsp. sea salt, divided
- ½ medium butternut squash, peeled and sliced into ½-inch half-moons (about 4 cups)
- 1 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cups broccoli florets
- 1 bunch collard greens, stems removed
- ½ cup toasted walnuts, chopped

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Combine all the dressing ingredients in a jar and shake well to blend.

Bring the water, farro, and ¼ teaspoon of the salt to a boil in a small pot, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook for about 20 minutes or until the grains are tender. Drain, then let cool completely.

While the farro cooks, place the sliced butternut squash on a baking sheet and drizzle with the olive oil, then sprinkle with ¼ teaspoon of the salt and toss to coat. Roast for 15 minutes, then use a metal spatula to flip the slices and roast for 15 minutes more, until the squash is tender and browned in spots. Place on a rack to cool.

Set up a steamer basket over a shallow pot of boiling water. Steam the broccoli for two minutes, until crisp-tender. Sprinkle with the remaining ¼ teaspoon of salt and let cool.

Roll the collard leaves into a bundle and slice across the roll to make thin slivers, then chop the slivers into inch-long pieces. Place in a large bowl.

Drizzle 1 tablespoon of the dressing over the collard slices in the bowl, then use your hands to massage and knead the leaves for a minute or two, until they're tender and slightly darker in color.

Spread the collards on a platter or four plates, then top with the farro, squash, and broccoli. Drizzle with dressing, sprinkle with walnuts, and serve.

Radicchio With Roasted Carrots and Quinoa

Makes four servings
Prep time: 45 minutes



SALAD:

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup quinoa, rinsed and drained
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. sea salt, divided
- 1 bunch young carrots (about 12 oz. total, about 4 to 6 inches long)
- 2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup hazelnuts
- 8 oz. green beans, trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 large navel or Cara Cara oranges
- 1 small head radicchio, chopped into bite-sized pieces

DRESSING:

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh parsley
- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. sea salt
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tbs. balsamic vinegar
- 3 tbs. plus 1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Place one oven rack near the top and one near the center.

In a small pot, bring the water, quinoa, and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of the salt to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and cover. Cook for 14 minutes, then take off the heat to let stand, covered, for five minutes. Remove the lid, fluff with a fork, and let cool completely.

Peel and trim the carrots, leaving a half-inch of each stem. Place on a baking sheet and drizzle with the olive oil, then sprinkle with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of the salt and toss to coat. Roast on the top rack for 20 minutes. Depending on the thickness of the carrots, you may need to roast them up to 10 minutes longer. Let cool.

While the carrots roast, spread the hazelnuts on another baking sheet, then toast on the center rack for 10 minutes. Let cool, then use a clean kitchen towel to rub the skins off as well as you can. Coarsely chop the nuts, then set aside.

Bring a pot of water to a boil and blanch the green beans for 2 minutes. Drain and rinse with cold water, then sprinkle with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of salt.

Use a chef's knife to cut the peel and pith from the oranges. Slice across the fruit to make thin rounds.

In a food processor, place $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the toasted hazelnuts, then add the parsley, garlic, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt. Process to mince very finely. Add the Dijon mustard and balsamic vinegar and process. Scrape down the sides and secure the lid, then, with the processor running, drizzle the olive oil through the feed tube and process until combined.

Spread the radicchio on a platter or four plates, then top with the quinoa, carrots, green beans, and orange slices. Drizzle with dressing, sprinkle with remaining hazelnuts, and serve. 🍴



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SUSTAINABLE SOBRIETY

QUITTING
ALCOHOL
MAY NOT BE EASY,
**BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE
TO BE HARD FOREVER.**

BY VERONICA VALLI

ILLUSTRATIONS: DANA SMITH



Many of us default to alcohol as a way to manage emotions. If we're stressed, struggling to decompress after work, fighting with our partner, or just celebrating, relaxing, or socializing, we often keep alcohol close at hand.

From time to time, we may also ask ourselves, "Am I drinking too much?" Perhaps we noticed our drinking increase during the pandemic in response to boredom, loneliness, or the absence of the usual guardrails.

Maybe we question whether those nightly two glasses of wine are good for us, even as social media is ablaze with hashtags affirming that #momneedswine. (These messages disguise the fact that most mothers really need more human support.)

As a sobriety coach and educator, I believe questions such as "Is my drinking that bad?" are the wrong ones. They lead us to compare ourselves favorably with people who routinely drink to excess. They imply that if we're making it to our jobs, fulfilling our social obligations, and keeping the kids alive, then drinking must not be a problem.

In my experience, a more useful query is this: "Does my drinking make sense for me?" This offers up more to think about. It keeps the focus on alcohol's effect on your life, today, which is different from anyone else's.

When our drinking no longer makes sense, we tend to do four things: (1) We drink too much; (2) we think about drinking; (3) we think about not drinking; and (4) we recover from drinking — which is to say, we nurse our hangovers.

These four things burn up a lot of time and energy. When they do, it's fair to ask whether we're getting a good return on our investment with alcohol. Do we really want to put this much life energy into something that offers such poor returns? If not, it may be time to change course.

When drinking no longer makes sense, it may be because of alcoholism. Alcoholism is a manifestation of the disease of addiction, and it can be deadly.

The approach I'm suggesting here can be useful whether you're pursuing sobriety (the term I use when someone has quit drinking because of addiction and also wishes to work on the deeper emotional issues that led to problematic drinking) or you're simply choosing to be alcohol-free (a newer term for people who have recognized that they feel healthier when they don't drink and they want to socialize without alcohol).

Regardless of which term pertains to you, if you decide to start living your life without alcohol, these five pillars can help you make change that lasts.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF SOBRIETY

I stopped drinking more than 22 years ago. At the time, I would have told you I was having lots of fun when I drank — but I wasn't. I struggled with depression and anxiety, and I used alcohol to cope. It never occurred to me that I didn't have to drink. I thought everyone drank, and my job was to find a way to manage it more effectively.

When it became clear how much alcohol worsened my anxiety, I quit — reluctantly. I was 27 years old, and I believed I would never have fun again. I thought my life was over.

How wrong I was.

Today, after many years of experience working as a psychotherapist and sober coach, I can honestly say that I never look back. I live joyously in the land of sobriety.

But in working with others, I have seen that stopping drinking by itself isn't usually enough to create a sustainably sober life. We all do much better when we follow a program to fill the gaps that used to be occupied by alcohol.

I developed the five pillars of sobriety to support that transition — and then help make sobriety a lasting experience. Embarking on this path is about more than avoiding alcohol: It's about finding new and more sustainable ways to take care of yourself and to live your fullest life.

Making time for movement is also an act of self-worth.

1 MOVEMENT

When we pursue sobriety, movement helps enormously. In fact, I require all my clients to adopt some form of regular exercise.

Movement fills time in a positive way, improves our energy levels, and connects us to others in a healthy fashion. Meeting at the health club for a workout or on some trails for a walk is a terrific way to bond, and it usually leaves us happier than most happy hours.

Movement also supports sobriety on a biochemical level. As Judith Grisel, PhD, notes in her book, *Never Enough: The Neuroscience and Experience of Addiction*, alcohol can act like a “neurological sledgehammer,” interfering with the brain's chemical balance.

Exercise helps stimulate the production of dopamine, serotonin, and other feel-good neurochemicals,

helping to restore balance in our brains and moods.

Making time for movement is also an act of self-worth. It means we devote regular time to activities that make us feel better, with no punishment later. A Friday-night yoga class instead of drinks after work. A Monday-morning workout that sets us up for the week. A sober Saturday night with friends, followed by waking up Sunday morning with the energy to exercise. This is the essence of treating ourselves kindly.

You might choose long walks, kettlebell training, long-distance bike rides, short HIIT workouts — how you move doesn't really matter. What's important is finding activities that bring you joy, which is the best motivator.

That said, exercising with other people does check a lot of boxes. We can't fake our fitness with others. We are where we are, which requires an honesty and vulnerability that can lead to deeper, more authentic connections.



2.

BALANCE

*Alcohol
interferes
with our
physiological
and
psychological
balance.*

Alcohol interferes with our physiological and psychological balance. Drinking can depress the central nervous system and dysregulate mood. It can mess up our body chemistry and make us crave sugar and salt.

We're also out of balance when we spend hours ruminating about what we said or did the night before, or whether we should have a drink tonight. This energy could be better spent elsewhere.

One of the best tools for cultivating balance is the acronym **HALT**, which stands for "hungry, angry, lonely, tired" — four common alarm bells that need immediate attention.

When we're drinking a lot, we may reach for alcohol or head to the bar to satisfy (or silence) these feelings. When we stop drinking, our needs remain the same, but the solutions are different.

Hungry. Sobriety involves learning to listen to our bodies. That means when it's telling us to eat, we eat. Remind yourself that when intense feelings arise while you're hungry — impatience, anger, and frustration — they usually disappear once you've eaten. Carry some healthy snacks with you so you can always take care of yourself.

Angry. We may feel entitled to a drink when we feel mistreated or resentful. But when we drink to drown out our angry feelings, we don't learn the vital skills of healthy conflict or how to set proper emotional boundaries.

It's important to learn to recognize your anger, take some deep breaths, and then figure out what's going on beneath the feeling, so you can choose your response.

Lonely. Loneliness often causes my clients to stumble; they think alcohol is necessary to sociability. It's not.

When you recognize that you're lonely, create a plan to connect. Make a list of all the people you can contact, then call, text, or email someone. Sobriety groups can be particularly helpful in the early stages, as you don't have to pretend everything is OK. (For more on the loneliness epidemic and how to connect, visit ELmag.com/lonelinessepidemic.)

Tired. Sleep is critical to maintaining balance. When you're tired, rest. You can also focus on where and how you spend your energy, so you don't burn yourself out. Give yourself permission to chill and leave tasks half-done when your energy is low. Observe where your energy gets drained. Change what you can.





3. CONNECTION

Alcohol is sold to us as a vehicle to quick connection. When we drink, we feel like we belong, and belonging is a powerful need. Although lots of people can enjoy alcohol appropriately and use it to enjoy social occasions, it is not necessary for connecting.

For some of us, alcohol can work against it. That's because the connections we create when we're drinking may feel more profound than they really are. Alcohol loosens our inhibitions, and what feels like a reasonable thing to say or share after a few drinks ends up producing regret the next day.

Then we may stew in shame and self-loathing about our oversharing, which leads us to feel embarrassed and afraid to face people. At that point, we end up avoiding others and cutting ourselves off from the connection we still truly need.

We need authentic connection, the kind that helps us feel truly seen and known. If we're lonely, creating artificial connections through drinking won't help us satisfy that need. Vulnerability is about being real. This means showing up as the fullest version of ourselves that we can muster, which we can't do when we're drunk.

Meaningful connections with others happen when we are connected to ourselves, which requires us to listen to our bodies and emotions. Alcohol can confuse the messages our bodies send; sobriety allows us to hear them clearly.

Alcohol can confuse the messages our bodies send; sobriety allows us to hear them clearly.

4.

PROCESS

We are always engaged in different processes: aging, learning a new skill, becoming a new parent, getting a divorce. When one process ends, another begins. These are the building blocks of our human growth.

At the same time, our past behavior patterns are almost guaranteed to show up during transitions in life. If we felt abandoned as children, we may feel abandoned whenever we're challenged to grow. If our ability to trust others was damaged, or if we were expected to care for everyone else first, we may continue to do those things unconsciously throughout our life.

Until we recognize and reflect on a pattern that was formed in childhood, we're likely to repeat it whenever we try something new or challenging. Recognizing and reflecting on our patterns is how we develop self-awareness.

But alcohol interferes with self-awareness. It can keep us stuck in patterns, because it prevents us from seeing and knowing ourselves at a deeper level.

To help my sobriety clients move beyond this impasse, I recommend a

process called **uncover, discover, discard**. It helps us develop the self-knowledge we need to escape our limiting beliefs.

Uncover involves revealing behaviors, patterns, and responses that are embedded in the unconscious mind. This helps us identify harmful core beliefs, such as the idea that other people cannot be trusted — or that they will always leave us, no matter what we do.

The next stage is to **discover** what this behavior, pattern, or response means, where it originates, why we have felt this way, and why we might have avoided examining it. While we may have been hurt by someone breaking our trust in the past, we may discover that it wasn't personal, and that the other person's choices had more to do with them than with us.

At this stage we can also validate how hurt we were and treat ourselves tenderly, acknowledging the pain but not letting it define us. As we recognize that we did not cause our hurtful experience, we may accept that we can't control people.

We can, however, become more discern-





ing about whom we trust, take small risks, and give people chances.

Then we **discard**. We let go of the past programming that no longer serves us. In this process, we commit to giving people the benefit of the doubt, to setting boundaries, and to using discernment. We may decide to trust people until they give us a reason not to. If they do, we can refuse to take that behavior personally.

This is how we change our faulty belief systems about ourselves. This is how we stop our limiting beliefs, which were born in the past, from shaping our lives in the present.

Finally, the goal of process work is not perfection but self-acceptance. Am I brilliant at all things? Of course not! I am an average cook, for example, but I am good enough, and that's all I really need to be.

Moving out of our limiting ways of thinking about ourselves is about accepting our humanness. Our imperfection can be messy, but it also leads to freedom.

***Our
imperfection
can be messy,
but it also
leads to
freedom.***

5.

GROWTH

We will always be called to grow, as people, as parents, as partners, and in our work and other relationships, even as we feel resistance.

Change is hard: We like the familiar, yet we are not called to be comfortable all the time. Growth is messy, and often frustrating, but pursuing it is worthy of our time and energy.

Alcohol can interfere with our call to growth by distracting and numbing us. When we default to alcohol to manage our emotions, we don't develop the skills we need to navigate life successfully. We also miss the opportunity to learn vital lessons that will help us become deeper, braver versions of ourselves.

For example, we might fear that we don't know where we're headed, and we'd prefer to stay where we are rather than face the unknown. But change will happen no matter how hard we resist it. The mistakes we make along the path are glorious growth opportunities.

There is no such thing as failure — only feedback. Focus on the

feedback, especially if it's uncomfortable, because within it are the tools we need to get to the next place.

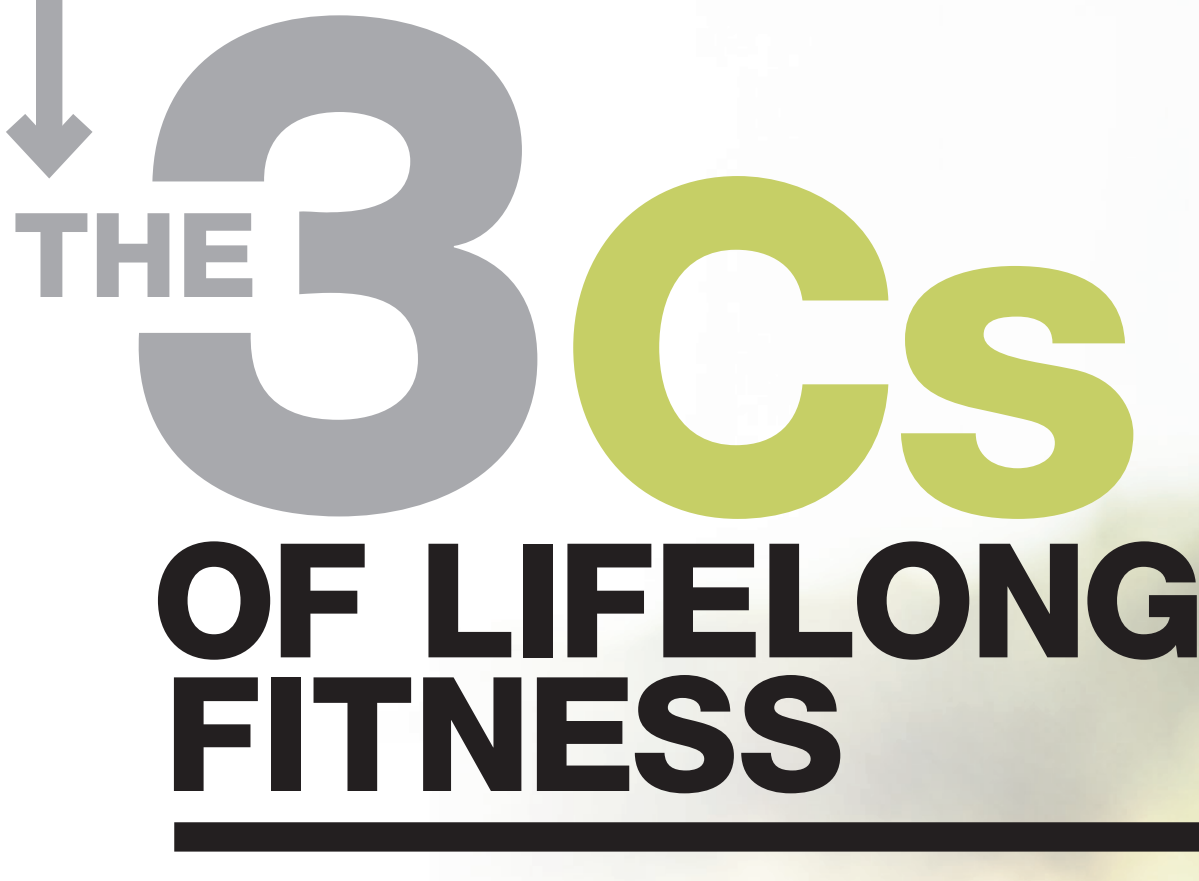
When I stopped drinking, at 27, all I wanted was some peace, a job, and a place to live. This was the sum of my ambition. Yet now I am teaching, coaching, and helping others, because I couldn't ignore the call to grow. I know it's calling you, too.

Sobriety offers us more energy and space to think our thoughts and feel our feelings. Imagine what you might do with those resources. What have you been longing to do or try? Are there places you've wanted to visit? Experiences you've wanted to sample but never had enough energy?

We have a finite amount of time here on Earth, and I am quite sure none of us was born to spend that time fighting a hangover and ruminating on what happened last night.

Remember that none of the pillars of sustainable sobriety needs to be accomplished perfectly. "Good enough" will get us where we need to go. 🍷





THE 3Cs OF LIFELONG FITNESS

How **consistency**, **curiosity**, and **compassion** can keep your fitness and health on track for a lifetime.

BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

For years, the prevailing approach to getting fit could've been described as a search for a magic bullet. Magazine headlines promised quick-fix workouts, internet exercise programs focused on burning calories and toning up, and celebrity trainers played the role of drill sergeant to push clients and TV-show contestants to their limits while simultaneously pushing them into the ground.

But over time it's been shown that the quick-fix, go-hard-or-go-home, shame-your-body-into-submission approach to exercise doesn't lead to long-lasting physical fitness or psychological well-being.

And although these approaches still exist, the pushback against them is strong. Exercisers are learning that feeling bad, physically or emotionally, is not required to feel good and perform well.

It is possible to enjoy — yes, *enjoy* — life-enhancing movement through every phase of life. It is possible to stick to a long-term fitness plan, regardless of your physical assets, liabilities, age, or goals.

At *Experience Life*, where our fitness philosophy has always centered on individualization and sustainability, we've identified three fundamental concepts behind every successful movement practice: consistency, curiosity, and compassion.

The exercise strategies may vary, but the principles remain the same: Bring these three Cs with you every time you walk into the health club, climb on your bike, or venture out onto the hiking trail, and you'll stay healthy and engaged, make better progress, and get more out of every step of your lifelong fitness journey.



CONSISTENCY:

TAKING IT SLOW AND STEADY



MANY PEOPLE take a boom-or-bust approach to fitness. They exercise hard, then let things drop; after months with little to no exercise, they then commit to another rigorous regimen without preparing their bodies.

“Sooner or later, the body pushes back, and they are unable to maintain their training,” says performance coach Joel Jamieson. Another period of inactivity follows, and the cycle starts anew.

Exercising too infrequently, of course, also undermines your efforts.

While better than not exercising at all, sporadic workouts won’t make you appreciably stronger, any more than practicing piano once a month will turn you into a maestro. Rather than getting fitter over time, you revert back to your previous condition — or even lose fitness — between widely spaced workouts.

Part and parcel of exercising too little or too much is a raft of negative emotions: guilt when you haven’t

been exercising; an urge to punish yourself with overly intense exercise; a sense of failure when you can’t keep it up. Minimal progress, frustration, exhaustion, and burnout are the unfortunate results.

Both approaches ignore the fact that exercise is a form of stress, from which your body needs an appropriate amount of time and resources to recover fully. Too much exercise and you don’t progress; not enough and your body breaks down.

The acute stress of a workout can take you one step back, explains Jamieson, but proper recovery takes you two steps forward, with each workout building on the previous ones. Ideally, stress and recovery occur in this predictable, dancelike rhythm, with progress — increased strength, skill, and fitness — as the natural result.

You can avoid the pitfalls of the boom-or-bust approach with more-consistent baby steps: Start slow, build up gradually, and stay on schedule.

Compared with the highs and lows of an all-or-nothing approach, slow-and-steady training might feel almost boring

— the gym-goer’s version of chopping wood and carrying water — but it’s unquestionably the best way to progress.

Generally, balance is best, but still, any exercise is better than none.

Consistency doesn’t have to mean working out daily. Neither does it mean adhering to a rigid schedule with no wiggle room for life’s pres-

ures. Your schedule doesn’t have to be punishing to be effective. You just have to stick to it.

“The difference between someone who can get results for a few weeks and somebody who can continually improve over months and years comes down to one single thing — consistency,” says Jamieson.

Even if you’re not interested in beating personal athletic records or dramatically reshaping your body, consistency is still critical: The stamina you build with a walking program, the flexibility you build with a yoga practice, and the mood and health markers you bolster with virtually any form of movement are far more likely to have a lasting effect on your physiology when you make movement a regular part of your life.

There’s another key benefit to consistent exercise, regardless of the activity you choose or the goals you set: After a while, physical activity becomes not just something you do but an essential part of who you are. That’s important. Too often, exercise is portrayed as a quick and temporary fix: “Lose 30 pounds in two weeks!”

But with consistency, movement becomes a rewarding activity that sustains you through all phases of your life. Consistency over long periods helps instill this mindset.

“Saying ‘I am a person who . . .’ is a powerful step,” says Barbara Powell, MA, NBC-HWC, holistic performance coach for Life Time Mind. “Whether it’s ‘I am a person who gets outdoors every day’ or ‘I am a person who is training for an ultramarathon’ doesn’t matter. It’s the shift in thinking that helps guide you toward habits and goals that are a better value-based fit than just looking to the latest TikTok influencer for inspiration.”

The difference between someone who can get results for a few weeks and somebody who can continually improve over months and years comes down to one single thing — **consistency.**”



CURIOSITY: CHANGING STRATEGIES AND GOALS

“HUMANS CRAVE two different things at once,” says Powell. “We crave security and novelty.”

As much as our bodies need the regularity and rhythm of consistent movement, they also need the opposite: variety. And that’s where the second C — curiosity — comes in.

You first establish a regular movement habit. But what you do during exercise sessions can (and should) change over time. That requires curiosity about the different activities you can do and how far you can push your capabilities in each one as you move through life’s phases.

Physically, this helps ensure progress over time: “Exercise works best if it regularly places a novel demand on your body,” explains Danny King, Life Time master trainer. At the beginning of a new program, nearly anything you do can work — walking, swimming, boxing, dancing. That’s because the activity is new to you.

But if you want to keep getting better — build strength and endurance or become more skilled at

your activity of choice — you need to add different challenges over time. It could be more frequency, better technique, new movements, more weight or sets, longer distances, or higher speed. The new demand forces your body to adapt again, and soon you’re better off for your efforts.

Exercise scientists know this as progression: gradually subjecting yourself to greater levels of stress over time. “If you lifted 10 pounds six times last week, your muscles won’t continue to get stronger unless you at least try to lift 10 pounds seven times — or 12 pounds six times — this week,” says King.

Similarly, runners might go a little faster or a little longer; martial artists might add new combinations to their repertoire; dancers might learn new steps.

Developing any new skill involves plateaus, but in general, curiosity about where your limits lie — and ways you can overcome them — can keep you moving in the right direction. Rather than sticking to the same workout and hoping for a different outcome, says Powell, “You’re asking yourself, *What else might I enjoy?*”

In the long term, your curiosity may inspire you to make bigger changes, switching entirely from one discipline to another as the mood strikes, turning in your swim trunks for running shoes, golf clubs for hiking poles, climbing gear for basketball high-tops.

Done on a regular basis — seasonally, for example — this becomes a version of what trainers call periodization: planned

variation over time. This

keeps the challenges

fresh, preventing

burnout, and

shields you from injury as well.

“You can only deadlift your max for so long before something goes wrong,” says King. “When your

routine is too static, sooner or later things

start to get tweaked.”

Staying curious about your current interests and abilities can help inform a decades-long fitness practice, too.

“As we get older, our capabilities can change,” says Powell. What’s easy and fun at 20 could feel awkward or challenging at 54 — even if you stay consistent with your workouts in the intervening years.

Instead of regretting the loss of some abilities, staying curious can keep you on the hunt for activities that suit your goals and abilities, whatever your age, interests, and limitations.

Psychologically, curiosity can protect you from the “never enough” mentality that can creep into even a well-designed workout program. “Curiosity allows us to look at our lives and goals without judgment,” Powell explains. “And to ask questions that guide us to new places.”

Ubiquitous images of perfect bodies and elite performers can cause you to focus on what others have that you may think you lack. But curiosity keeps you focused on the next unique horizon for you.

What you do during exercise sessions can (and should) change over time. That requires **curiosity** about the different activities you can do and how far you can push your capabilities in each one as you move through life’s phases.



↓ COMPASSION: GIVING YOURSELF A BREAK



AS THE FINAL ELEMENT of an effective workout program, compassion may seem an unusual choice. For some, exercise conjures images of intensity, willpower, and even fanaticism. What role can a soft skill like compassion play in a discipline like that?

Answer: an essential one.

It may not make for click-bait Instagram posts, but treating yourself gently — backing off when you need a break, being kind to yourself when you fall short of perfection, and staying sensitive to your body's needs at all times, regardless of your fitness level — is just as important as the social-media-ready work of #killingit in the gym.

“Talking to yourself compassionately cuts to the meat of the matter: your mind,” says Powell. If you’ve missed a few workouts, for example, “you’re much more likely to get back to business — and enjoy the process — if you forgive yourself and move forward.”

This is especially true when you’re in the beginning stages of a fitness program. “When we’re trying to create new habits, it can take root more easily when we approach what we’re doing with warmth and understanding,” she explains.

We tend to think that establishing a fitness habit is a one-and-done proposition: Lock it in and you’re good for life. But that’s almost never the case.

A movement practice is like a marriage — a lifetime journey filled with not just straight-aways and stunning vistas but speed bumps and detours, too. “Everyone goes through phases when their motivation flags,” says lifestyle coach Cat Thompson.

There are many reasons this can happen, Thompson explains — all of them understandable. “If a client loses momentum, instead of blaming them, I always ask, ‘What else is going on?’ Often, it’s some external stress or pressure.” When the stressful period ends, it’s much easier to get back to the program.

Your body might also simply be fatigued and need a break. “Most workout classes are designed to make you sweat and get sore,” says Thompson. Few of them wax and wane in intensity in accordance with your body’s needs.

But everyone’s body needs a vacation from time to time, so adjusting your workouts — to your health, your other commitments, the time of year — is necessary. Otherwise, an injury may be the way your body shows you you’re not paying enough attention to it.

The trick is to see your need for rest not as a failure but as an essential part of the process, and to coax yourself gently back to the program — or to a new type of movement that interests you — once you’re ready to go again.

Staying compassionate with yourself makes the process of exercising not just more pleasant but more effective in the long term.

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Researching the training regimens of many of the best endurance athletes in the world, exercise physiologist Stephen Seiler, PhD, FACSM, found that, over years of training, 80 percent of the workouts these elite athletes performed were low intensity: long, slow sessions at what was, for them, a comfortable intensity that allowed them to talk easily.

Seiler contends that many recreational athletes erroneously believe that the best way to get the most out of their workouts is to push themselves to exhaustion every chance they get. Paradoxically, he says, this overzealous approach winds up limiting progress.

“When we slow down on most days and maybe go longer, and train hard on some days because we’ve got the motivation and energy to do it, performance gets better and the process is more enjoyable and sustainable,” explains Seiler. “‘No pain, no gain’ is wrong.”

Don’t fall for the short-term satisfaction of a killer workout — and the misguided belief that exercise has to feel like punishment to be effective.

Instead, cultivate the patience and foresight to pull back the reins 80 percent of the time so you can truly go full out the other 20 percent of the time.

Self-compassion may also play a perhaps surprising role in helping you leap hurdles. Athletes and exercisers at all levels often face situations of emotionally difficult setbacks: These may include performance failures such as “choking” during an event; harsh criticism from others like coaches, teammates, competitors, or parents; and high standards set by our own inner self-critic.

Research finds that self-compassion can be key to resilience, a resource that you can draw on “to help navigate setbacks experienced in sport in a healthy and positive way,” as a 2021 article from the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) states. (For more on compassionate self-talk, see “From Mean Girl to Cheerleader” on page 37.)

Self-compassion can even help in recovering from injuries and preventing us from pushing through in damaging ways. “By reducing athletes’ anxiety, worry, and avoidance coping

strategies in response to injury, self-compassion can enable athletes to focus on healthier, more proactive ways of moving forward with recovery,” the SIRC article notes.

Such strategies may include practicing self-acceptance over self-criticism, leading to a healthier kind of mental toughness.

So, to turn a popular adage on its head, when the going gets tough, it’s the self-compassionate that get going — wisely.

For all but the most elite among us, the primary purpose of an exercise program is to make the rest of your life more fulfilling: to help you show up for your work, family, and hobbies with more presence and inspiration — and also to support you in moving well functionally for as long as possible. A workout program should feed you, not exhaust you, frustrate you, or make you feel guilty or ashamed.



CONSISTENCY, CURIOSITY, AND COMPASSION are powerful antidotes to the perfectionism, exhaustion, and boredom that can overtake the most well-intentioned exerciser.

“Many people stare at the TV, scroll through their phones, or listen to podcasts while they work out,” says movement teacher Frank Forencich, author of *Beware False Tigers: Strategies and Antidotes for an Age of Stress*. “They’re disengaged from their bodies and what they’re doing.” As a consequence, their workouts feel like drudgery: arduous work done for no discernible purpose.

When you’re lit up by what you’re doing — walking the line between consistency and curiosity and remaining compassionate to your body’s needs throughout the process — motivation remains high, even after years of regular exercise. Keep exploring activities that excite you, and you’ll never want for a reason to exercise or the energy to do it.

“The motivation is in the movement,” says Forencich. 🧘

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



Making Peace With Menopause

This stage of life in a female body is often shrouded in mystery.

But it doesn't have to be.

BY **COURTNEY HELGOE**

Though it was February in Minnesota, Shailene kept waking up hot and sweaty in the middle of the night. She was sure something was wrong with the furnace.

After her spouse checked and confirmed that the furnace was in perfect working order, it dawned on her that she was having her first hot flashes. Shailene was in her late 40s, so the timing made sense — it just hadn't occurred to her until that moment that she could be starting menopause.

This story was told at a friend's 50th birthday dinner, and here's the punchline: Shailene is a physician who specializes in women's health. Even with her professional training and years of experience, the changes in her own body caught her off guard; physicians are not immune to the information vacuum here.

Enter menopause: the hormonal transition that dare not speak its name. Right now, more than 60 million American women are in the midst of perimenopause (the two- to six-year period that precedes the end

of menstruation) or menopause (its actual cessation).

Yet most healthcare providers, including gynecologists, may receive only one or two lectures about menopause during their medical training. This leaves most women to face these changes without much guidance from their doctors.

"Up until recently, menopause was invisible," says Heather Hirsch, MD, MS, NCMP, clinical program director of the Menopause and Midlife Clinic at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital.



This can be true in social circles as well. Many women feel embarrassed by menopause and try to tough it out privately; forget asking for advice from friends or family.

Yet going through menopause in isolation can make a potentially rocky transition more difficult. “Thinking a weird body thing is uniquely yours is very disempowering,” notes obstetrician and gynecologist Jen Gunter, MD, in her book *The Menopause Manifesto*.

She’s found that knowledge helps. “Many women are relieved simply to

know their experiences are common and expected.”

Understanding menopause for what it is — a normal, if occasionally disruptive, hormonal transition — can also help ease some of its emotional stresses. Aviva Romm, MD, an integrative-medicine physician, women’s-health specialist, and author of *Hormone Intelligence*, recognizes that menopause symptoms can be difficult to embrace, especially given the historical cultural stereotypes.

Still, she encourages her patients to challenge the destructive myths

about inevitable decline. Many women find that they feel freed by the end of their periods and the changes in their hormones. “Menopause is not a time when your fire has gone out,” says Romm. “You actually have a beautiful pilot light inside of you.”

No matter where you are on your own hormonal trajectory, it’s worthwhile to have reliable information about menopause so you don’t have to experience this transition in the dark. To that end, these are some answers to common questions.

What is menopause?

Menopause is a natural event marking the end of the reproductive phase in a woman's life, signaled by the end of menstruation. It becomes official after a full 12 months have passed without a menstrual period.

This normal part of female aging usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55; the average age is 51. Menopause before 45 is considered "early menopause," according to the Cleveland Clinic; before age 40 is "premature menopause."

Early menopause may be induced surgically, by removal of the ovaries, or chemically, with medications, such as chemotherapy, radiation, or those used to hold hormone-receptive breast cancer at bay. (Periods that stop before age 40 without medical intervention are sometimes called "primary ovarian insufficiency"; if your periods stop this early, check with your healthcare provider to rule out other complicating health factors.)

Once someone passes the one-year mark without a period, they are technically postmenopausal — though some health experts think that term is misleading. "I'm a fan of using the word 'menopause' to encompass the whole continuum or experience, from the menopause transition onward," Gunter explains, since health symptoms associated with menopause "don't magically start or stop with the final period."

And while these hormonal shifts can present themselves in some unsettling ways — hot flashes, moodiness, sleeplessness, forgetfulness, and a hide-and-seek libido — this is all par for the course. "Menopause is not a disease," notes Gunter. "It is an evolutionary adaptation that is a part of the survival of the species."

Why does menopause happen?

The technical reason is that the ovaries run out of viable eggs; the evolutionary reason is less clear. Humans are one of only five species known to enter menopause; the others are orcas, pilot whales, belugas, and narwhals. All of these species have relatively lengthy life spans.



Among whales, menopausal females are also uniquely helpful to the survival of newborns and their mothers. This is known as the "grandmother hypothesis": Nonreproducing female whales have more experience finding food and less need of it, so they can provide wisdom and support for their reproducing daughters while requiring fewer resources for themselves.

What's going on hormonally?

During the reproductive phase, ovaries produce a fertilizable egg on a more-or-less monthly cycle. This process is governed primarily by estrogen, which is involved in the release of the egg, and progesterone, which prepares the uterus for possible implantation.

The human female body is born with a finite number of eggs, so after enough menstrual cycles, the ovaries begin to run out, and cycles stop. On the way to this point, levels of estrogen and progesterone behave erratically, occasionally surging as they decline in fits and starts — the hallmark of perimenopause. You might feel like you're riding a hormonal roller coaster because that's exactly what's happening.

But Romm notes that estrogen does not disappear. "During what

are called our reproductive years, we produce primarily estradiol, which is a potent form of estrogen," she explains. "Then, when we transition into menopause, we primarily make estrone. We still have estrogen — it's just a different, less potent form that doesn't stimulate reproduction, but it is keeping our hearts and brains healthy and doing other things."

What is perimenopause?

All these hormone shifts don't happen overnight. Perimenopause usually begins somewhere in the early to mid-40s. Cycles can become unpredictable and may be much heavier or lighter, and symptoms such as hot flashes may begin to set in.

Perimenopause can be bewildering, because menstrual periods continue, and we often think of menopause as the time when periods end. Yet many of the symptoms associated with menopause are at their worst during this transitional stage. "If you are in your menopause transition and experiencing that hormonal chaos, know for many women this is the rockiest phase," Gunter notes.

Meanwhile, some women barely register a blip. Everyone is different. That said, biological mothers and daughters often find that their menopause begins at or around the same age.

What Are the Most

Common Signs

of the Menopausal Transition?

Technically, menopause is the cessation of periods for 12 months, but as you've gathered by now, we're talking about a process. Because estrogen plays a role in keeping many of the body's systems running smoothly, its decline can contribute to many of the irksome symptoms of the menopausal transition.

WEIGHT GAIN

Many women notice that their clothes begin to fit differently after age 40, even if their diet and exercise habits remain the same. According to functional-medicine physician Sara Gottfried, MD, author of *The Hormone Cure*, this is because the rate of fat gain increases as estrogen declines, and much of this fat will be stored at the waist, as fat-distribution patterns also change. When hormones level out after menopause, the weight gain typically stops.

While the weight itself is not a health issue, Gottfried notes that it can correlate with metabolic-health challenges, including a greater risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, and problems with insulin regulation.

Try this: Gottfried suggests a modified ketogenic protocol (unlike strict keto, her approach includes a modest amount of carbohydrates) and intermittent fasting (IF) to help her patients manage their hormones, including insulin and cortisol, and stabilize their weight.

Romm, meanwhile, suggests a cautious approach to IF. "For some women it can help," she says, but she's concerned that effects may diminish after six to eight weeks. Fasting can also have rebound effects on blood sugar and weight, she adds, "so maybe do it a couple of days a week instead of all the time." (For more on fasting, see ELmag.com/intermittentfasting.)



SLEEPLESSNESS

With or without night sweats, disrupted sleep is a problem for many women during perimenopause. Again, this has to do with hormonal changes. Melatonin, the hormone that regulates sleep timing, decreases naturally with age, Romm explains.

What's more, melatonin is produced from serotonin, which is also related to estrogen production; some research suggests that as estrogen declines, so does melatonin. These shifts are normal, she emphasizes, but they do set up a "triple hormonal whammy."

Try this: Romm, a trained herbalist, recommends a sleep-supporting cocktail of three herbal tinctures: passionflower, valerian root, and lemon balm. During a phase of rough sleep, take 20 to 45 drops of any or all of these a half-hour before bed, and then again 15 minutes before lights out.

Place a third dose on the nightstand in case you wake up in the middle of the night.

HOT FLASHES

Vasomotor symptoms, colloquially known as hot flashes, are the signature symptom of perimenopause and menopause. They can be triggered by a warm room, a stressful situation, or nothing at all, and typically they last from one to five minutes. They may feel like a warm flush or a full-blown conflagration, which makes you want to immediately strip down to your tank top in a room full of people in sweaters.

Sixty to 85 percent of women experience hot flashes, and frequency may be correlated with race, with African American women reporting the greatest number of episodes. Researchers remain at a loss for why this is so.

Try this: For immediate relief during a hot flash, Gottfried recommends this breathing exercise: Take a five-second inhale, 10-second hold, and five-second exhale. Repeat until you cool down.

Other strategies include wearing layers you can remove as needed, keeping the bedroom cool at night, and avoiding spicy foods and alcohol if these are triggers for you. (Red wine, notes Romm, can be one of the worst culprits.)

Severe or chronic hot flashes can signal a greater risk for cardiovascular disease. If this is the case, work with your healthcare provider on heart-health protective strategies, such as smoking cessation and dietary changes. (For more on heart health, see ELmag.com/hearthealth.)

(Common Signs, cont.)

ANXIETY AND MOOD SWINGS

These are familiar PMS symptoms as well as routine features of the menopausal transition. In both cases, the abrupt shift in hormone levels can tank mood. Like estrogen, progesterone also drops (though more gradually); this hormone typically has a calming effect. When progesterone goes down, it can be “harder to soothe yourself,” explains Gottfried.

Try this: You know better than anyone else what helps you manage your mood in a healthy way. Is it a yoga practice? Playing guitar? Long solo walks? Start there.

At a minimum, consider adopting a nonnegotiable daily movement practice, and keep a few calming herbal interventions on hand, such as kava, ashwagandha, or CBD.

MEMORY LOSS

As hormones begin to shift, many women find themselves struggling with word recall and other short-term memory tasks. This may be caused by the hormonal switch from the more potent estradiol, which plays a role in brain function, to estrone, the less-potent form of estrogen.

Happily, this effect seems to be temporary, according to one study that followed 2,362 perimenopausal women for four years. Once the menopausal transition concluded, these cognitive issues disappeared.

Try this: Rhodiola, an adaptogenic herb, can help with mental clarity and focus. A sense of humor is also handy.



DECLINING LIBIDO AND CHANGES IN VAGINAL HEALTH

Throughout the reproductive phase, estrogen helps foster interest in sex, and when estrogen declines, so can libido. Estrogen also plays a prominent role in keeping the tissues of the vagina healthy, and accordingly, they can become drier and thinner as the hormone declines.

These changes also involve structures beyond the vagina, including the bladder, urethra, and vulva; medically, this is known as genitourinary syndrome of menopause, or GUSM. It can make intercourse uncomfortable or painful and bring on a more frequent need to pee. As symptoms go, this group may get the Biggest Bummer award.

Try this: Regular walks support blood flow. Adding flaxseeds and soy foods (for the phytoestrogens) can help relieve vaginal dryness. Regular sexual activity (using additional lubrication as needed) may be the best way to maintain elasticity.

Be willing to experiment. “Sometimes a small adjustment creates big changes,” notes Gottfried. “I love it when a patient realizes that she can alter her presumed life-sentence of low sex drive with a particular form of meditation, like orgasmic meditation.”

What Can I Do to Make Perimenopause and Menopause

Easier?

Though everyone will have her own unique path through menopause, the following interventions are useful across the board.

Exercise

Strength training is vital here. Women and men both experience muscle loss, or sarcopenia, over time, so maintenance is key.

“We’ve got to preserve the muscle we have, and to do that we’ve got to take action,” says Amanda Thebe, a certified personal trainer who focuses on menopause and health. She suggests starting a strength-training regimen that builds up to 30 to 40 minutes, three times a week. It’s OK to start small and build up over time.

Strength training is any exercise that taps either body weight or equipment, such as free weights and resistance bands, to stimulate muscle growth.

In addition to this, Thebe recommends daily movement. “It’s so important for our overall health, and the easiest way to do this is to pop on your sneakers and get outside for a walk.”

Gottfried notes that a regular yoga practice can help offset specific menopause symptoms, such as hot flashes and moodiness.

Protect Your Sleep

Sleep is vital to general health and mood regulation. Make it a priority, and resist the temptation to skimp.

Get serious about sleep hygiene: no phones or TV in the bedroom, keep the room dark and cool, practice a wind-down routine during the last hour of the day. Keep herbs like valerian root on hand for difficult sleep phases. (For more sleep tips, see [ELmag.com/sleeproutines](https://www.ELmag.com/sleeproutines).)

Focus on Diet and Gut Health

A whole-food, vegetable-centric, easy-on-the-sugar diet helps regulate blood sugar, supports weight stability, and provides enough fiber to keep the microbiome happy and

humming — which is good news for the gut-brain connection. “The gut-brain axis puts gut function at the center of any mood, weight, and energy issue that a woman faces,” notes Gottfried.

Romm emphasizes the importance of getting “plenty of fiber, both for micronutrients and gut health.” She recommends following the Mediterranean diet, which is heavy on vegetables and light on animal protein. Any of the many traditional diets that emphasize vegetables, healthy fats, and legumes will do. (Learn more about these benefits at ELmag.com/foodroots.)

She also suggests limiting simple carbohydrates and sticking mainly to nongrain seeds, such as buckwheat, millet, and quinoa. “Another great go-to is flaxseeds,” she adds. “Use them in your oatmeal and your smoothies. They help with estrogen and progesterone levels, and are a phenomenal fiber, so you get all the great gut benefits.” She recommends a tablespoon or so per day.

Go Easy on Coffee and Booze

Coffee can offer some neuroprotective effects, Romm says, but caffeine can amplify anxiety; one cup a day is plenty.

Meanwhile, wine can worsen reflux (increased reflux is part of aging) and disrupt sleep. Relinquishing your nightly glass will be worth the rewards. Save it for special occasions. For the occasional cocktail, Romm suggests vodka — it’s the least sleep-disruptive. Just keep it to one drink.



Try Herbal-Supplement Support

Many women find that certain herbs help downshift menopause symptoms. Maca root, for example, can raise estradiol levels in menopausal women, mitigating a variety of symptoms, including vaginal dryness and memory loss, Gottfried notes. Just add a teaspoon of maca-root powder to a smoothie or yogurt.

Romm is a fan of the plant chasteberry. “It can help improve both estrogen and progesterone levels and is shown to help with hot flashes, mood shifts, and sleep.”

She suggests a different approach for women with a history of estrogen receptor-positive breast cancer. “If that’s the case, use black cohosh, which also has a lot of benefits but doesn’t increase estrogen levels.”

Both herbs are available in tincture and capsule form.

Talk to Your Friends

One of the most comforting resources during the menopause transition is other people — those who’ve gone through it, or who are going through it too. “It’s so normalizing to talk to other women about it,” says Romm.

It’s also helpful to share the positive changes that accompany menopause, even as you process what you’re letting go. “It’s natural to mourn a phase that has passed, like when you marry, you might mourn your single life,” offers Romm. “But it’s important to remember that you will spend the next 30 to 40 years in menopause. This is a new phase.

“What is this going to look like? How are we going to embrace this? This is a chance to feel liberated from the expectations of others and embrace what it is that we are here to do,” she says. “We are old enough now to do what we want.” 🍷

COURTNEY HELGOE is the *Experience Life* features editor.

What About Hormone Replacement?

Some women turn to hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to ease the menopausal transition. Using synthetic hormones to replace declining estrogen has a decades-long history.

After early research by the landmark Nurses’ Health Study suggested that HRT might increase risk of breast cancer, many people shied away from it. Concerns that it increases cancer risk have since been mostly disproven, but integrative physicians Sara Gottfried, MD, and Aviva Romm, MD, recommend building a solid foundation of lifestyle interventions before turning to this option.

For Gottfried, hormonal therapies are the third and last step — after lifestyle and herbal solutions — in her sequen-

tial approach to hormone balancing. Romm takes a similar approach, noting that even bioidentical hormones (which are often marketed as a gentler alternative) are still serious medication.

Still, Romm sees HRT as a good option if the menopause symptoms for which these drugs are indicated are seriously affecting your quality of life. “Be cautious but not shy if HRT is going to help your well-being,” she says.

For many women who have done all they can with lifestyle and diet, HRT marks the difference between manageable and unmanageable symptoms — and quality of life matters.

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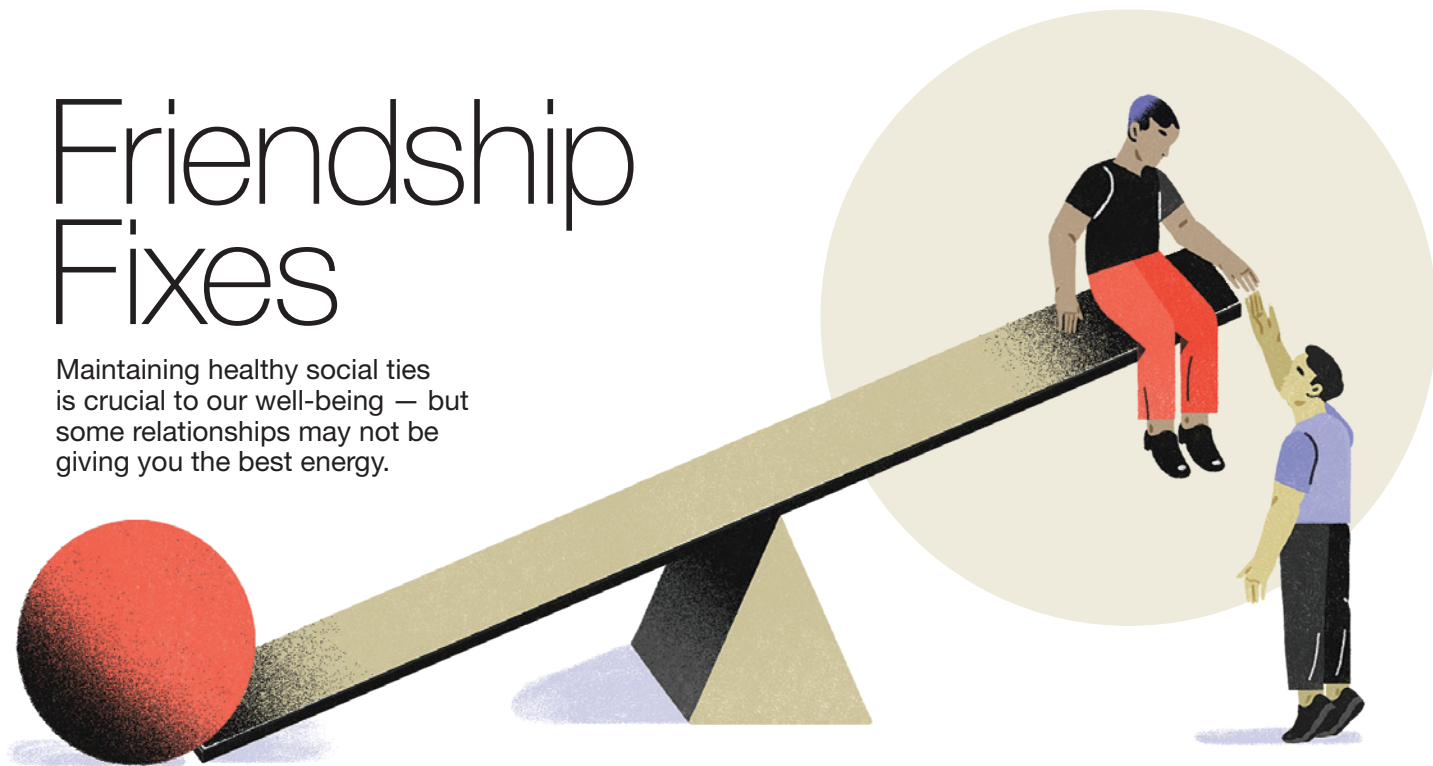
— Fern Watt,
author of *Adventure Dogs*

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Looking for adventurous ideas? Your pup's ready to show you the way.

Friendship Fixes

Maintaining healthy social ties is crucial to our well-being — but some relationships may not be giving you the best energy.



BY JESSIE SHOLL

Perhaps you've been feeling unsteady about a certain friendship. You're stressed about seeing the person, nervous when you're together — and once you say goodbye, you feel exhausted. Still, whenever they call, you feel like you have to pick up the phone. After all, relationships take work, right?

If this dynamic sounds familiar, you may be involved in a toxic friendship. Nicole Sbordone, LCSW, author of *Surviving Female Friendships: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, defines it as an unhealthy relationship that can include jealousy, a lack of trust, imbalanced levels of commitment, and manipulation.

There are three questions to ask yourself to determine if your friendship is unhealthy, says marriage and family therapist Janay Holland, MFT, PhD:

- Do you feel trapped in or obligated to this friendship, as if there is no healthy way to end it?

- Do you feel mentally or emotionally drained after you spend time with the person?

- Do you find yourself making excuses not to spend time with them?

The answers to these questions may indicate that the dynamic in your relationship is affecting your daily life, Holland explains. "In that kind of friendship, you pour into it, but it doesn't pour back into you. You put in a lot of energy, time, space, and love, but when you spend time with this person, your glass is completely empty."

Even with clear definitions like these, it can be hard to recognize when you're involved in a toxic friendship, and even harder to change it.

This holds true especially for introverts who may have a tendency to get steamrolled by others. "We like having an extroverted person in our life who will stand up for us," Holland says. "They may treat us really bad, but they don't let others treat us badly."

That kind of locked-in relationship is sometimes called "hostile dependence," notes psychotherapist Kathryn Ford, MD. "We need contact with other people so much that if we can't get positive contact, we will settle for negative contact."

The word "toxic" implies a situation is poisoned, fatally flawed, or without cure. But there is hope in some cases. If you address the issue, it's possible that a relationship can be steered back on course in time.

Ford suggests taking a more nuanced, less binary view: There's a continuum of positive and negative experiences, and sometimes a friendship can be nudged back onto the positive side of that line.

One caveat: Sometimes a relationship that's too consistently toxic can't (or shouldn't) be saved — especially if there's any kind of abuse involved. Still, these steps can help repair a friendship that has developed unhealthy patterns.

Talk to the Person

“There’s no replacing the heart-to-heart talk,” Ford says. For such a conversation, she often recommends that her clients look for what she calls “the grain of truth.”

Say a friend comes to you and shares, “Lately I feel a sense of competition between us, and I’d like to figure out where it’s coming from.” Rather than immediately pushing back, she suggests, notice your reaction. Then, find something true in the comment.

It might not be true in exactly the way they’re expressing it, Ford notes. “But ask yourself, ‘What could be true about this?’ Take what your friend says and work with it.” Perhaps you’re not actually competitive, but lately you’ve been envious. Maybe they have a great partner, and you don’t, or they have a wonderful job, and you don’t.

When you respond, be honest about your feelings and your part in the dynamic.

“Most experiences between two people are cocreated,” Ford says. “You each have a role in it.”

You can also think of this conversation as a way of checking in on the status of your friendship. If a friend comes to you to talk through an aspect of your relationship, that’s a positive sign — they want the friendship to work, and they’re willing to be open with you to make that happen. If you initiate the talk, it’s the same sign of goodwill. Win-win.

Reset Smart Boundaries

Holland advises her clients to create realistic boundaries. “If you have been enmeshed in this friendship for 10 or 20 years, asking you just to cut the person off is unrealistic. That’s not fair to you and not fair to them.”

She suggests considering this type of thinking: Instead of showing up for them seven days a week, I’m going to show up on those three days that I really have that energy.

Creating boundaries is important to make you feel that you’re in control of yourself and your time again, and that you’re a partner in this friendship — not just the person getting dumped on all the time. You may experience guilt trips or even cruel behavior from the other person, Holland warns, adding, “That’s when we remind ourselves of our boundaries,” as well as what inspired you to set them.

And remain strong. “In order to get this toxic friendship back to a healthy place, we have to be consistent with the boundaries that we set,” she advises.

Part of setting smart boundaries is learning how to say no. It’s one of the hardest things for people entangled in an unhealthy friendship — especially if you’re someone who rarely says no to anyone. But it’s also the most important, because it can help you safeguard your emotional well-being. (For more on the freedom that comes from saying no, see ELmag.com/sayno.)

Go to Counseling — Individually or Together

If you’re absolutely unsure what to do about the friendship, you may want to see a professional for clarity and a neutral perspective. You may even want to go to counseling together.

Once viewed as an option for only individuals and partnered relationships, therapy has entered the realm of normalcy in just about any configuration. Holland has helped friends, in-laws, and even a pair of police officers who worked

side by side find their way into more harmonious relationships.

“It’s OK to give a person a chance to do better,” Holland says, “and it’s OK not to know how.” Getting professional support could help you find that opportunity to mend a strained relationship.

Seek Alternatives

If despite these efforts you still can’t make it work, consider other ways this relationship could fit into your life. Can you change the dynamics by backing off a bit? Not all friendships need to be of the daily-contact sort.

Perhaps you could put more time between chats or get-togethers and make it more of a second- or third-tier friendship instead of a primary one. Sometimes that can reduce some of the pressure.

But if you’ve tried everything and the friendship still leaves you stressed out or feeling manipulated, it may be time to disconnect. If this is the case, Sbordone says, talk to the person, “and if you’re the one ending it, be honest about that.”

In as kind a way as possible, explain why you’re ending the friendship. Thank them for the time you’ve spent together. And don’t ghost the person — Ford, Holland, and Sbordone all agree — unless you feel threatened.

A friendship breakup can be just as emotionally devastating as the dissolution of a love affair or a marriage. So after it’s over, allow yourself space to grieve the loss. It may help to talk to a therapist or reflect on your emotions in a journal. Just be mindful if you choose to talk to mutual friends about the situation — you don’t want to spread tension or ill will.

You can feel good about the fact that you tried your best. And remember: By ending a toxic friendship that’s irreversibly stuck in an unhealthy pattern, you’re being a good friend to yourself. 🧡

JESSIE SHOLL is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.



In order to get this toxic friendship back to a healthy place, we have to be **consistent with the boundaries that we set.**

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Happier Days Ahead

BY DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL

Gabrielle Bernstein is one of those superinfluencers of the modern age — and she's trying to use her influence for good. And for calm.

Her 1.1 million Instagram followers center themselves with the help of her wise words; thousands more tune in to her podcast, *Dear Gabby*. The best-selling author has written nine books, including her latest, *Happy Days*, a memoir of her journey from trauma-concealing Manhattan party girl to grounded spirit junkie.

Speaking to *Experience Life* from New York City, Bernstein discussed a problem we all face: balancing inner peace with real life, family, COVID-19, and people who need something from you right now.

"I wrote most of *Happy Days* in 2020," she says. "I had a toddler at home, I was doing IVF, there was COVID, I was pregnant for five and a half months and lost the child. I stopped public speaking; I got a cat as part of my grief recovery — it was the year I really made a commitment to self-care."

"That question of how you face your trauma from the past so you can become free and at peace in the present — that's what I was grappling with and why I wrote the book. I really think it's one of the most important issues of our time."

These regular practices are a few of Bernstein's go-tos for handling life's challenges in the day-to-day.



Author and spirit junkie Gabrielle Bernstein is on a mission to share inspiration for living a better life.

FEED YOURSELF RIGHT

"I eat simply now. Between IVF, pregnancy, and loss — that's hard on a body. So, I make intentional, specific choices with my food: light meals of vegetables and protein, mostly. My son, Oliver, is a soccer boy; he always has to have a ball of some kind at hand, and he's taught me that a blueberry-strawberry smoothie is basically always a good idea."



TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

"I take a sauna almost every day, for about 20 minutes. I work hard, I put a lot of energy into the world, and now I'm unapologetic about putting energy back into myself."



PUT IN THE WORK

"I'm a work in progress, but a few things feel like major accomplishments. My husband and I do Internal Family Systems therapy; we have a really beautiful commitment to therapy together, and therapy is hard. But if you stick around for the miracles, holy cow, it works. If you have some desire to feel better in your life, and you're willing to do some work on yourself, open yourself to that concept and it will guide you. Life is a journey for everyone."

RAGE ON THE PAGE

Suffering from the jaw-clenching pain of TMJ (temporomandibular joint) disorder, Bernstein sought help from a therapist and describes in *Happy Days* how she modified the recommended coping techniques into what she calls Rage on the Page: 20 minutes of journaling on the difficult, impermissible topics that might be bottled up behind her clenched jaws, followed by 20 minutes of meditating on whatever emerged during the journaling process.

"It's been game-changing for me," she says. "Getting out whatever is bugging you, reprocessing it through meditation. It's helped me to transform my boundaries, and now a lot of my codependent behavior is gone. It's been great — I've become all about boundaries, and it's awesome."



DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL

is an award-winning writer based in Minneapolis.

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Reset Your Internal Clock

How to prepare your body for the transition from Daylight Saving Time.

BY HENRY EMMONS, MD



For many who live north of the equator, the dwindling daylight hours of autumn can trigger a slight sense of dread. As the days get shorter and darker, some of us start to anticipate a drop in mood and energy levels, commonly known as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

Our bodies have an internal clock, known as our circadian rhythm, that responds to the rise and fall of the sun. When this rhythm shifts in response to decreased sunlight, it can throw our sleep schedule off kilter — and cause us to feel tired and blue in the winter months.

Because sleep quality is key to energy and mental focus, regulating our sleep schedule is a crucial component of SAD prevention and treatment. This can get tricky in late fall when Daylight Saving Time (DST) ends and the body's rhythm is disrupted — but a few simple shifts in sleep hygiene can help you manage this transition more smoothly.

Work With Your Biorhythms

Our daily biorhythms — physiological activities that follow a cyclical pattern — determine, to a remarkable degree, our sense of well-being, our energy levels, and even the release of our hormones.

Sleep is the most obvious of our biorhythms; it follows the 24-hour circadian rhythm. Another circadian cycle involves the stress hormones. Healthy cortisol levels, for example, peak in the morning, when we're typically most alert and productive, and drop in the evening, allowing us to sleep.

Our day-and-night rhythms are so important that the body features a gland devoted entirely to managing them. Located near the center of the brain, the pineal gland helps set our sleep timing by releasing the hormone melatonin in response to darkness, generally at night.

When something disrupts this timing, your body often rebels. This may occur during the annual clock change, during travel across time zones, while you're working night shifts, or even when you sleep too late.

Exposure to bright light, especially the blue light from digital devices, during the evening hours may also trick the body into thinking it's still daytime, delaying the release of melatonin. Try keeping lights low in the evening and using warm, dim lights in the bedroom.

Eating too much in the late evening can disrupt circadian cycles as well. And if you're going to drink alcohol, enjoy it with an early dinner so your body has time to metabolize them both before bed.

Ease Into DST

Readjusting your sleep window by an entire hour all at once can be asking too much of your body. (Forget traveling across time zones and asking it to adjust to an eight-hour time difference.)

You can, however, ease the transition by going to bed 15 minutes later on each of the three days leading up to the end of DST. This is how that would look if your normal bedtime were 10 p.m. and your usual wake time were 6 a.m.

- Thursday bedtime — 10:15 p.m.
- Friday wake-up — 6:15 a.m.
- Friday bedtime — 10:30 p.m.
- Saturday wake-up — 6:30 a.m.
- Saturday bedtime — 10:45 p.m.

[DST begins]

- Sunday wake-up — 6:00 a.m.
- Sunday bedtime — 10:00 p.m.

When it comes to preventing seasonal blues, it's not just how long you sleep that matters; it's also the timing. The key to mood stability is to get up at about the same time every day. If you have trouble falling asleep at your usual bedtime, use bright light first thing in the morning and possibly again in the late afternoon. Dim the lights in the late evening — this will help keep your melatonin on an even keel.

Give your body a chance to fall into a consistent rhythm, and you'll soon start to shed that feeling of dread about the coming winter. You can look forward to it as a time to get cozy, drink some tea, and enjoy the darkness instead.



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

Adventure Dogs!

Looking for adventurous inspiration? Your pup's ready to show the way.

BY MICHAEL DREGNI

Ask a dog: They're ready for adventure at the drop of a hat. It's humans who often need the pep talk and prep time.

And that's in part what inspired Fern Watt to write *Adventure Dogs*. As the subtitle explains, the book offers "Activities to Share With Your Dog — From Comfy Couches to Mountain Tops." And it's chock-full of glorious photographs of dogs and people having fun together — in case we humans are a wee bit slow in getting the picture.

"All dogs are adventure dogs," Watt explains. "People sometimes think that 'adventures' must be extreme or require a lot of athleticism or money or time off from work. But there are lots of adventures right outside the front door if we remember

to look for them. Dogs remind us that the ordinary experience can sometimes be extraordinary. And dogs are great at showing us how to see the world in new ways."



Dogs are great at showing us how to **see the world in new ways.**

Watt is also the author of *Gizelle's Bucket List*, which recounts a list of must-see, must-do experiences she created for her 160-pound English mastiff, Gizelle.

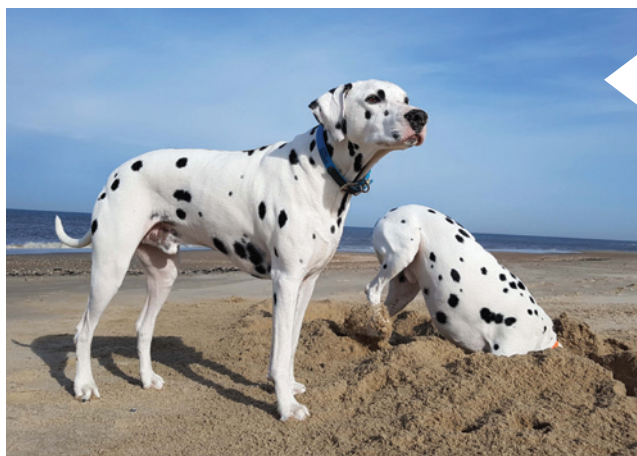
Watt's latest book began with a philosophical query: What do dogs want to do for fun? She was inspired by her new pup — a rescue cattle-dog mutt named Bette — and compiled 50 everyday activities, including neighborhood walks ("sniffaris"), surfing safaris, and even canine-and-human "doga" yoga vinyasas.

The activities here are backed by research: Bette tested and approved.



FIND MORE CANINE FUN

For a Q&A with Fern Watt, see ELmag.com/adventuredogs.



FUN IN THE SUN — AND SAND

"I used to think that if I wanted to give my dog the best life ever, I needed to spoil her with handmade designer sweaters from fancy pet boutiques, buy her the most advanced and high-tech dog toys, and treat her to brunch on upscale restaurant patios," Watt writes. But she soon realized Bette had a whole different worldview: Simple can be wonderful — such as a day at a dog-friendly beach, like the one these two Dalmatians are enjoying.

"My goal is to try to be as amazing as Bette thinks I am. And for me, this is about taking her on as many fabulous adventures as possible. But it's also about making time for the simple adventures that Bette loves."



PLAYTIME

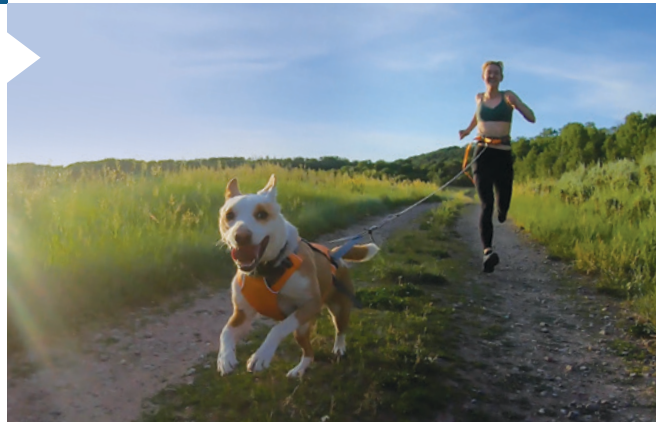
“Sure, you might look at your dog snoring like a freight train at 3 in the afternoon and assume his athletic prowess is limited to propelling his portly body from the floor to the bed,” writes Watt. But your dog is usually just resting up, waiting for *you* to get moving.

For some dogs, it’s a game of fetch, a hike, or a swim; whichever, your dog is usually game. And if you want to get serious, you can join organized sports, such as DockDogs, with competitions including dock jumping, human-and-dog swim races, and more. Pooches who measure less than 17 inches from their withers to the ground compete in DockDogs’ Lap Dog class; senior dogs in the Legend class.

CANICROSS RUNS

Sure, a walk is great, but if you and your pup want to ramp up your activity level, try a canicross run: It combines aspects of trail running and dogsledding — some people even term it urban mushing. In canicross, your pooch is attached to your waist with a bungee leash and will pull you forward whenever your feet are off the ground.

Watt ran a canicross with Bette: “We were running not to cross the finish line or reach a distance or time goal or even earn a medal. We were running for the joy of it. Bette’s tongue dangled from her mouth and a huge smile spread across my face.”



LONG WALKS

For the dog — and human — who can’t get enough of walking around the neighborhood, pack up the kibble in a doggie backpack and head out on an overnight or multiday adventure.

“Some people assume their dog doesn’t like to swim or play fetch or would be scared of the ocean or wouldn’t care to see snow. But a lot of dogs are scared of things because they don’t understand them — just like humans,” says Watt.

“Taking your dog to new experiences and places and having patience to let them literally sniff it out is important. Dogs want mental and physical stimulation just like humans. Plus, taking your dog on new adventures is a great way to take yourself on new adventures.”

CANINE SURFARI

Surfing doesn’t come naturally to pooches, of course. But when introduced to riding waves on a surfboard or atop the water on a stand-up paddleboard, many dogs enjoy the adventure. “I really think Bono loves the feeling of dropping into a wave with the wind on his face. The same feeling the humans love about surfing!” says Ivan Moreira, human to Bono, a surfing chocolate Lab.

Dog-surfing competitions operate under rules that ensure safety: Pups must actually want to follow their humans into the water. And they usually do.

“I guess some dogs really do want to do everything with their people,” writes Watt. 🐾



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The Katia Story

A few years after moving from the former USSR to the United States with her family as a teen, Katrina Alexandria — who goes by Katia — began to experience health problems: weight gain, skin breakouts, fatigue, and lethargy. With her mom, Katia began investigating possible causes and realized the issues might be the result of the food she was eating.

Together, they began researching the U.S. food supply, which led her to adopt a whole-foods-based, organic diet and eventually develop her own whole-foods line of protein bars, aptly named Katia Gourmet Protein Bars. Now with six flavors, Katia Bars are a tasty, nutritious, clean alternative to other options on the market. (To read Katia's full story, visit ELmag.com/katiastory.)

Find Katia Gourmet Protein Bars in the LifeCafe coolers and at shop.lifetime.life.

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GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES

The line between cultural appreciation and appropriation isn't always clear. These four questions can help you make sense of the difference.

BY KATHERINE REYNOLDS LEWIS

It's nearly Halloween, and your kid is begging to dress up as Black Panther, or Moana, or a geisha.

Whatever costume your child is eyeing, it's worth pressing pause to consider whether it might be disrespectful toward a culture that isn't theirs.

Cultural appropriation involves adopting elements from a culture or identity that's not your own in a way that is harmful, stereotypical, or exploitative. Sometimes, an act of appropriation is particularly offensive because it's not really about culture at all, but imitates or exaggerates physical characteristics, says Jacob Levy, PhD, a political-theory professor at McGill University. For example, a few years ago, Disney pulled its costume of the demigod Maui after critiques that the brown bodysuits adorned with Polynesian tattoos were a form of "brown-face" — defined as white people attempting to portray themselves as people of color.

On a similar note, actress Kenya Moore faced criticism for donning a Native American head-dress in an episode of her television show. "The Indigenous community has

been saying for longer than I can remember that it's inappropriate for non-Indigenous people to wear head-dresses, and within our community, they're only worn by people with specific roles," notes Jay Soule, a.k.a. CHIPPEWAR, an Indigenous multi-disciplinary artist and cofounder of the Reclaim Indigenous Arts initiative.

The lines are harder to draw between cultural appropriation and simply appreciating and celebrating another culture. After all, culture is constantly interacting, borrowing, remixing, and evolving. "It's unrealistic to say that everyone should stay in their own ethnic lane and treat cultures as if they're hermetically sealed off from one another," Levy says.

"Part of the fun about being in a very diverse society, or being able to travel, is you can experience different types of communities and cultures," agrees Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, PhD, a professor of Asian American Studies at the University of California, Irvine. But power dynamics, racial and cultural hierarchies, and historic oppression often complicate those exchanges, she notes. "There tends

to be a one-way transfer, in terms of pleasure, or income and opportunity."

So how do you learn about and enjoy other cultures without appropriating them? Levy, Soule, Wu, and other experts suggest using these four questions to guide your behavior whenever you're interacting with traditions — including fashion, food, music, art, holistic health, and spiritual practices — that don't come from your own lived experience or heritage.

What is my purpose and position?

Begin by questioning your intention in engaging with the culture or tradition. Are you coming from a position of power or cultural dominance? Do you have a genuine interest, or are you doing it simply for fun or so you can post about it on social media?

"It's possible to honor cultures that are not our own, and it's important to do so," says Brian Tate, a

Brooklyn-based cultural curator and marketing strategist.

"First, ask yourself, 'Do I want to wear this for the purpose of lifting the culture up, or because I think it would be funny or make me seem cool?'"

African American music, fashion, and other

“It's unrealistic to say that everyone should stay in their own ethnic lane and treat cultures as if they're hermetically sealed off from one another.”

cultural elements have historically been appropriated by outsiders hoping to appear more hip. Meanwhile, veterans may bristle at people donning military gear because it makes them look tough, without sensitivity to those who served in the armed forces.

If your purpose is to sell something or capitalize on a trend, it's a good idea to think twice. Take chefs who include soup dumplings (or Chinese *xiaolongbao*) on a menu because they're popular but fail to appreciate the depth and variety of Chinese cuisine, says Gina Lee, a partnership coordinator at Solid Ground, an advocacy and service nonprofit in Seattle.

"Ask yourself, 'Am I viewing this cuisine in a stereotypical way?'" Lee suggests. "'Am I halting my learning about this cuisine at just this ingredient or this one element?'"

"Cultural appropriation raises all sorts of complicated issues, and it's not an easy process to figure out what the right path is," Wu allows. "But I think it's important to try to engage in that process, as opposed to saying, 'Well, it's complicated, so I can do whatever I like.'"

Do I understand the origins of this cultural tradition?

Curiosity is a good place to start when engaging with another culture, says Kerri Kelly, a community organizer, yoga teacher, and author of *American Detox: The Myth of Wellness and How We Can Truly Heal*. "You have to learn about what you don't know, especially in a culture steeped in colonization that has justified theft and genocide," she says. "Understand the history of suffering and struggle and resilience."

For example, as you enjoy adding Spam to a dish, learn about the ongoing harm caused by the colonization of Hawaii that made the shelf-stable meat a staple of the islands, Lee suggests. And learn about current events as well as history. "The people of Hawaii have a lot of threats to their well-being right now," she explains.

If you're uncertain whether an aspect of a culture is sacred, research is your first step. "We're in a world

of information," Tate notes. "Spend some time researching the issue online. Then contact a local organization that represents that community and ask them. Start a conversation."

That learning can help you avoid missteps down the road. If you understand the origins of the dream catcher, a Native American talisman, you'll recognize the version selling for a few dollars at a gift shop as a knockoff. An authentic dream catcher requires hours of work, including harvesting materials, Soule explains.

"If that same knockoff work wasn't available in stores, galleries, gift shops, and museums, think about how it would allow our people to support ourselves with our Indigenous arts and culture, which would contribute to economic reconciliation," he says.



Often, we're seeing these as binary choices — right or wrong, tell me the answer. I don't know that there is one answer."

Do I have permission?

In the aftermath of 9/11, Kelly found healing through yoga. She eagerly learned all she could about the practices that originated in Southeast Asia, including taking teacher training. But reflecting on it now, she believes she missed an important step. "I didn't get permission," she says. "I assumed that I could take up that space, that I could engage in that medicine."

Two decades later, Kelly continues to grapple with the question of how a white woman can practice and teach yoga in a respectful, nonappropriative way. "I'm constantly questioning how I work with these practices and rituals in a way that doesn't exploit them," she says. While attributing practices

and crediting her teachers, she also tries to build relationships of accountability with friends and colleagues who have roots in Southeast Asian countries. "My answer will always be: Ask the question in relationship."

For example, if you're attending a Chinese wedding and want to wear a cheongsam (a type of dress) that a Chinese friend gave you, ask your hosts if it's appropriate, so you can know their preference. "Often, we're seeing these as binary choices — right or wrong, tell me the answer," Kelly says. "I don't know that there is one answer."

If someone explicitly invites you to share in a cultural exchange, you're likely avoiding appropriation, mimicry, or devaluation. But if people from that culture are asking for compensation — such as with Indigenous arts — honor that request. Just because one person says a cultural borrowing is OK with them doesn't guarantee that all other people from that culture will agree.

Am I open to being corrected or challenged?

To seek permission, you need to develop relationships across cultural lines. Begin by asking. If the first person you consult doesn't have an answer, they may point you to a better source. "It's always worthwhile to start a dialogue," Wu says.

Those relationships will help you avoid exoticizing another's culture and will keep you accountable. Accountability is a form of care and love, says Colombian-born theologian Jo Luehmann. When engaging with cultural practices that aren't from your tradition, understand that you're a guest.

"I don't get to center my voice. This is not a place where I should be profiting, writing books, or getting clout," she explains. "I subject myself to the authority and wisdom of those whose lived experience is rooted in this tradition." 🌱

KATHERINE REYNOLDS LEWIS is a writer in Washington, D.C.

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The Standards We Accept

Achieving our goals is about more than meeting our expectations. It's also about the behaviors that get us where we're aiming to go.

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

What defines us? Is it the occasional successes and wins we enjoy over time? Or is it the day-to-day habits and behaviors that lead us to those successes and wins?

My view is that it's the latter — and I believe it's the standards and expectations we set around our values, mission, and goals that drive meaningful progress and, ultimately, results. They also help us create the environment and culture we desire.

In the space of personal development, a common refrain is that to change your life, you have to change your standards. This is important: Elevating our standards helps us achieve our goals. It allows us to create stronger relationships, become healthier, and challenge ourselves to do new things — all of which seem to lead to greater satisfaction and happiness.

It's a way and a means to bring out the best in ourselves and create the quality of life we want.

Expanding on this is another idea that answers the first question I posed above: "What defines us is the lowest standard we accept." This phrase has recently become a drumbeat in my life.

It speaks to the idea that we become not what our best performance or behavior is, but what we tolerate; what we tolerate becomes who we are.

At Life Time, for instance, our members have high service standards, and we have internal policies that guide our execution. We write them down and make sure everyone is aware of them.

The execution of these standards is key; if something falls short, then that can easily set the new standard.

All new team members go through training that includes a set of prin-

ciples we call PPCC: "Pick up, Push in, Clean up, Close what is open." Everyone knows if there is trash in the parking lot, you pick it up. A chair askew in the LifeCafe? Push it in.

While these may seem like tiny details, tending to them is one of countless actions that ensure our clubs stay impeccable.

Letting things slide
can seem easier in the
short term, but the effects
add up over time.

All it takes is one lowered standard or one act of looking the other way to lead to a "How did we get here?" moment. A grain of sand is nearly invisible, but in bulk it becomes a beach.

Letting things slide can seem easier in the short term, but the effects add up over time.

The minute we begin to tolerate work that isn't up to par, or allow behavior or performance that is less than we or others are capable of, we set a lower standard — and fail to deliver on a goal or promise.

The risk in any environment, whether at home, at work, or elsewhere, is that this can influence the culture. So, standards must be implemented, defended, and inspected daily, which requires an incredible amount of dedication. When it makes sense, those standards need to be changed or raised.

How can we do this in our professional and personal lives?

It starts by identifying essential behaviors and parameters. People have to know our expectations, which we have to set with crystal-clear guidelines (in the workplace, this requires strategy, objectives, goals, and measurements). We also need to create belief in the why that guides the standards.

Then, we have to consistently inspect the expectation: Are our actions and behaviors aligned not only with the standards, but with our values? Is what we're delivering or doing providing the promised value? If yes, great! If not, it's time to course correct, because behavior drives culture, and culture drives results. We get what we're willing to tolerate — at home, at work, in our communities, in the world.

When a standard is compromised, it is the responsibility of all of us to say, "This is not acceptable." We need to commit to speaking up, making changes, and taking action when something isn't working.

The effect of this dedication permeates far beyond the moment: It changes — for the better — the culture we've worked so hard to create.

So, we need to be confident, expect excellence, and strive for greatness in all we do. This kind of behavior influences every decision we make and every action we take, from the tiny to the tremendous — and it can set the standards for where we go from here.

BA

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



Freedom lies
in being bold.

— ROBERT FROST

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