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BECOME A PRO-AGER

Tips for Embracing
All Your Years

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Fall can feel hectic with the return to school and a full work and activity schedule. Juggle one fewer thing and simplify mealtime with these slow-cooker recipes for white-bean chicken chili, turkey ragu, quinoa enchilada casserole, and more. Prep them in the morning, set the timer, and come home to a nourishing dinner. Scan the QR code below or go to ELmag.com/slowcooker to check out the recipes.



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WHAT'S YOUR SITTING SCORE?

Sitting for long periods can undermine your health. This assessment is designed to gauge your sedentary behaviors — and inspire you to take steps toward a more active lifestyle.

ELmag.com/sittingscore

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ELmag.com/hormonetherapy

HOW TO START RUCKING

Adding a weighted pack — known as a rucksack — can amplify the strength and endurance effects of your daily walk. Learn how to incorporate the practice into your routine.

ELmag.com/rucking

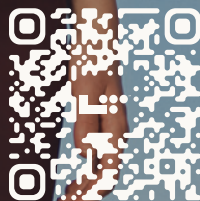
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LIFE TIME
HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE

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

Play It Again

AS A MOM of teen and tween girls, I am well acquainted with the enthusiasm of Swifties, the avid fandom of singer-songwriter-superstar Taylor Swift. It all started in our home in late 2022, when Swift released *Midnights* and our then 12- and 9-year-olds' general interest became full-on passion.

While I had followed Swift's career from its beginning and could sing along to many of her songs, both of our girls — seemingly overnight — knew *all* the words to *all* the songs from not only this new album, but from *all* her albums. They played her music on repeat. They watched (and rewatched) her music videos. They had regular, lengthy discussions about their favorite albums, often debating about and then ranking them from most loved to least. I was (and still am) often brought into the conversation: "Mom, what's your favorite?"

When *1989 (Taylor's Version)* came out, in October 2023, my older daughter — frustrated that we wouldn't let her stay up for the midnight release — woke up early on a Friday so she could listen before school. And at one point before the spring 2024 release of *The Tortured Poets Department*, I found a Post-it note on which that now 13-year-old had written predictions about which songs she would like most based solely on the names.

Ask either of our daughters anything about Swift — her music, her Eras Tour, her concert outfits, her life — and they are likely to answer without hesitation. Ask my husband how he feels about the constant soundtrack and the ongoing conversations about Swift, and he's likely to say, "Are we really listening to/talking about her again?!"

At this point, you might be asking yourself where I'm headed with this and how Swift relates to *Experience Life* and this issue. Don't worry — I've got you!

Just as Swift's presence has been a constant in our home these last few years, certain lifestyles factors are fixtures in *Experience Life's* coverage of health and wellness topics: mindset, movement, nutrition, sleep and stress management, and community.

From issue to issue, it could start to seem like we're a record on repeat: More often than not, at least part of the solution for overcoming many lifestyle-related health challenges (think type 2 diabetes or high blood pressure) includes these foundational habits and behaviors. They're essential for building, maintaining, regaining, and achieving optimal health and fitness.

We replay them time and again because, in many circumstances, we have some agency around them and can use them to our benefit. In this issue, for instance, you'll discover more ways to move your body with others (see page 54). You'll find insights on how healthier eating and sleeping habits can strengthen your internal ecosystem, making it less welcoming to cancer (see page 62). And you'll delve into breathwork and learn how it can positively shift your mindset and relieve stress (see page 83).

It's our daily actions, behaviors, and habits that set the foundation for our health and well-being. So while you will continue to see similar recommendations for various health and wellness obstacles, they will always come with a fresh take and reflect the latest research. Just as my family — at least three out of four of us — will embrace our inner Swiftie whenever the next album drops.



"Just as Swift's presence has been a constant in our home these last few years, **certain lifestyles factors are fixtures in *Experience Life's* coverage of health and wellness topics."**

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

FOOD, FABULOUS FOOD!

✉ I just spent the last hour reading the Food Issue (May/June 2024), and I am amazed by the vast wealth of information related to food and health. As a health-oriented family, we have been recently discussing different topics, like the use of creatine for menopause, eating together as a family, food as medicine, functional medicine, prostate-issue prevention steps, and many other things. And they are all addressed in this issue — and much more! What a treasure. Thanks for all your work in keeping us informed and healthy.

Fede R.

📷 Sometimes simple is best! “Sheet Pan Egg-in-a-Hole” (May/June 2024) is such an underrated breakfast.

@happybakedayshow

🌱 All of these recipes look authentic (“5 Plant-Based Mexican Recipes,” March/April 2024). I am Mexican and a vegetarian since I was born. So I know the struggle of making authentic Mexican food without all the meat. I honestly can’t wait to try the green pozole. This is a recipe I have been looking for everywhere. Thank you for compiling such delicious and yet healthy treats.

Citlali

FOND MEMORIES OF FARM LIFE

✉ Though I grew up in a city, I too feel very fortunate to have spent quality time some 80 years ago on my grandparents’ farm, where holiday meals included meat and vegetables harvested right there in the barnyard and from nearby fields (“Origin Stories,” May/June 2024). Grandpa would take an axe to the chicken coop, and Grandma would say, “I’m going out yonder to pick a mess of beans.” Cousins on a different farm challenged themselves to live for a year without a trip to a grocery store.

Deloris C.

CREATING SPACE FOR REST

✉ This article deeply resonated with me (“The 7 Types of Rest,” May/



June 2024). It was helpful to read how Sandra Dalton-Smith, MD, differentiates between the seven types of rest.

As someone who’s generally on the go, with the day starting at or before 6 a.m., I’m very conscious of when my body needs rest on a daily and weekly basis. Apart from observing the Sabbath, I have found that building periods into the workweek in which I can take a 30-minute nap, avoid screens for an hour, or block my calendar (even if not at work) has led to a higher sense of happiness.

Maxbetter V.

NATURE’S INFLUENCE ON HEALTH

🌿 I always know when it’s spring in my area when I hear the songbirds singing first thing in the morning (“The

Healing Power of Birdsong,” May/June 2024). What a lovely way to wake up.

June S.

🌿 This article was validating (“How Nature Supports Our Mental Health,” April 2022). I love to be outside in nature walking, hiking, swimming, peakbagging, etc. These are the healthiest of addictions, in my opinion. Anything outdoors is better: cooking, reading, playing cards, difficult conversations, calming a child. Nature is a wonderful backdrop for weddings too.

Lily F.

ON SPACE AND STUFF

🏠 I started decluttering four years ago when we began taking care of my mother after her head injury from a fall (“The Art of Swedish Death Cleaning,” April 2024). I realized then how much of her stuff we had to go through, so I started going through mine. It has been blissfully liberating.

Jacqueline G.

🏠 Why not reuse many of the single-use products (“6 Single-Use Products to Replace,” March/April 2024)? I reuse the plastic grocery bags all the time. Same with many baggies, etc. It doesn’t hurt to reuse anything you can. All of them do wear out at some point, though.

Andrea C.

HELP FOR THE HANDS

🌿 “The Gardener’s Workout: 7 Functional Moves to Prevent Injury” (March 2023) is a great article, but what about gardening-prep exercises for the hands? My back, legs, arms, etc., do fine, but my hands are my weak point. They grip tools as I rake and shovel, and they do the real work when I’m picking up bags of gravel. They are the smallest muscles, but they work as hard as any of my other body parts.

Barbara P.

You’re in luck: Our workout in this issue is all about building grip strength (page 26). You can also check out [ELmag.com/grip-strength](https://www.experiencelife.com/grip-strength) and [ELmag.com/improvegrip](https://www.experiencelife.com/improvegrip).

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Letters to the Editor

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The Health Hazards of a JUNK-FOOD HABIT

ULTRAPROCESSED FOODS

have long dominated the average American's diet: They currently account for approximately 60 percent of our daily caloric intake. But it's only in recent years that evidence has emerged to calculate the effects of this fare on our health — and the accumulated research may finally force government regulators into action.

The latest studies show that our junk-food habit is a major contributor to a variety of chronic diseases. It may even be playing a role in lowering the nation's average life expectancy.

The results of a review of 14 meta-analyses involving 9.9 million people show that those whose diets contained higher levels of ultraprocessed foods were some 50 percent more likely than those who ate moderate amounts to die from cardiovascular disease. They were also more likely to suffer from type 2 diabetes as well as anxiety and other mental health conditions.

The study, published in the *BMJ*, goes on to link such dietary choices with an increased risk of all-cause mortality, obesity, depression, and sleep problems.

"The adverse health outcomes associated with ultraprocessed foods may not be fully explained by their

nutrient composition and energy density alone but also by physical and chemical properties associated with industrial processing methods, ingredients, and byproducts," the authors write.

Their findings reinforce the results of another recent commentary, published in the *American Journal*

"The multinational companies that produce ultraprocessed foods are just as, if not more, powerful than tobacco companies were in the last century."

of *Medicine*, in which physicians at Florida Atlantic University consider the connection between junk-food consumption and myriad chronic diseases. The "novel ingredients" in these foods — various emulsifiers, maltodextrin, and other additives — are foreign invaders "never before encountered by human physiology."

They can cause havoc in the gut microbiome, triggering an inflammatory response that promotes disease.

Corresponding author Dawn Harris Sherling, MD, and her colleagues believe that high junk-food consumption may partly explain why life expectancy in the United States has decreased in recent years.

The mounting evidence linking ultraprocessed fare to chronic disease and shortened lifespans mirrors research in the last century that gradually raised public awareness of the health hazards of smoking — and eventually forced the government to mandate warnings on tobacco products and limit their marketing.

The federal dietary-guidelines committee is reportedly considering some response, but Sherling doubts that we'll see regulatory action anytime soon. "The multinational companies that produce ultraprocessed foods are just as, if not more, powerful than tobacco companies were in the last century," she says in a press release about the commentary. "And it is unlikely that governments will be able to move quickly on policies that will promote whole foods and discourage the consumption of ultraprocessed foods."

— CRAIG COX



Exercise MAY REDUCE PROSTATE-CANCER RISK

Ramp up your fitness regimen to reduce your chance of developing prostate cancer.

That's the takeaway from a recent Swedish study that found those who were more active than their sedentary counterparts were less likely to develop the disease that killed an estimated 34,700 Americans last year.

Kate Bolam, PhD, and her research team collected and analyzed information from a database containing the results of in-lab fitness and other tests involving more than 57,000 Swedish men between 1982 and 2019. Their findings, published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, suggest that improving cardiorespiratory fitness may reduce the risk of a prostate-cancer diagnosis by as much as 35 percent.

How a more active body becomes less prone to the disease remains something of a mystery, but Neil Iyengar, MD, an oncologist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (who was not involved in the study), believes exercise improves the immune system's ability to search out and kill cancer cells.

"We know even a single bout of exercise helps our body release immune cells in our circulation," he tells the *New York Times*. "It also helps to improve the population of immune cells in our tissues that fight cancer cells."

The American Cancer Society recommends engaging in at least 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity exercise, though there's no consensus among researchers on what type of movement is most effective. By simply finding an activity we enjoy, Bolam says, we can lower the chances that prostate cancer will develop. It is, she notes, "something that is wholly in our control."

— CC

REVERSING TYPE 2 DIABETES Q&A WITH JASON FUNG, MD

In recent years, type 2 diabetes has become a runaway epidemic, says nephrologist Jason Fung, MD, author of *The Diabetes Code*. "Since type 2 diabetes constituted about 90 to 95 percent of all diabetes, this was a pretty serious problem," he says. But the American Diabetes Association (ADA) no longer considers type 2 diabetes an inevitably chronic and progressive disease. Indeed, it can be reversed, Fung explains. We spoke to him about the disease and his treatment approach.

EXPERIENCE LIFE • We used to fear that type 2 diabetes was a life sentence. But new evidence says this is not the case?

JASON FUNG • Type 2 diabetes is largely a dietary and lifestyle disease, and reversing it does not require drugs, but a change in the diet and lifestyle.

EL • What is your recommendation for treating type 2 diabetes effectively?

JF • Dietary treatment is the most important, since this is a dietary disease. The ADA says reducing refined carbohydrates can aid blood-sugar management. In published, real-world studies, you can put about 50 percent of type 2 diabetics into remission with such a diet.

It's not hard to understand: Carbohydrates are sugar molecules. If you eat carbs, which your body breaks down into glucose, your blood glucose (blood sugar) goes up. If you eat proteins and healthy fats and you are eating amino acids and fatty acids, then you are not eating sugar, and your blood sugar does not go up.

The other significant way to treat type 2 diabetes is intermittent fasting. Again, not hard to understand: [When you go longer without eating], your body will start burning the

excess glucose in your body. If your blood glucose goes down, you don't need medications to do it. Eventually, you can stop all medications, which means remission.

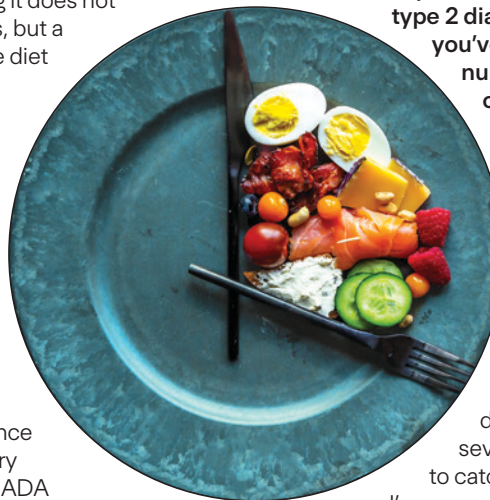
EL • Is it possible to reverse type 2 diabetes even if you've had it for a number of years, or is this mostly if you catch it in an early stage?

JF • It is reversible in most cases but not all. It depends upon how long you've had diabetes and how severe it is. It's best to catch it early, but I've seen people reverse their disease even with a 20-year history of the disease.

EL • What do you recommend for type 2 diabetes prevention in the first place?

JF • I recommend the same things: Reduce refined carbohydrates, and practice intermittent fasting.

— MICHAEL DREGNI



LEARN MORE

For an extended version of this Q&A with nephrologist Jason Fung, see [ELmag.com/fung](https://www.ELmag.com/fung).



Marijuana + Antidepressants = A Risky Combination?

AS RESEARCHERS LEARN

more about marijuana, depression, and the relationship between them, some cannabis users may wish to take a closer look at their medicine cabinets.

Cannabis is fully legal in two dozen states and medically legal in over a dozen more. Consumption has been increasing steadily for years, with an estimated 35 million Americans now using marijuana at least once per month.

“The legalization of marijuana in many states seems to have accelerated a more permissive and accepting attitude, especially among adolescents,” explains Larry Young, MD, a board-certified psychiatrist who works primarily with kids and teens. “Unfortunately, this attitude has led to a focus on the drug as a quick fix, and many are not aware of potential adverse effects.”

Antidepressant use has also seen a steady rise. A 2020 data brief from the National Center for Health Statistics reported that between 2015 and 2019, more than one in eight American adults had taken an antidepressant in the past 30 days.

Those numbers are likely even higher now: Prescription rates soared

during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among teenage girls and young women.

A Complex Relationship

That these trends have occurred in tandem may not be coincidental. Researchers are learning more about the link between depression and one of our body’s key neuromodulatory structures, the endocannabinoid system (ECS).

Impaired ECS functioning has been linked to depression. But the picture gets murkier when exogenous cannabinoids (those derived from plants) enter the mix.

Numerous studies support the notion that heavy marijuana use can exacerbate certain symptoms of depression, namely lack of motivation and disturbances in sleep. Yet concluding that marijuana worsens depression — let alone that it *causes* depression — oversimplifies a complicated relationship.

Researchers remain unable to determine whether cannabis use increases the likelihood of developing depression, or whether depressed individuals are more likely to use cannabis. What’s more, there’s evidence

that, in low doses, marijuana can actually alleviate depressive symptoms.

When Medicine Can’t Metabolize

It’s possible that marijuana doesn’t necessarily worsen depression so much as interfere with its treatment. Cannabis can impede the body’s ability to process certain medications by hindering an enzyme in the liver that’s responsible for metabolizing them. Among the medications affected are several types of antidepressants.

When these medications are not adequately metabolized, higher levels of them remain in the bloodstream, which can worsen common side effects, like diarrhea, dizziness, and fatigue. And those who experience these side effects are more likely than average to stop taking their medication.

Still, the link between cannabis and diminished antidepressant effectiveness is not a straight line. Outcomes depend not only on the type of antidepressant but on the amount of marijuana consumed, as well as on individual variables.

Metabolism is one of these: People with slower metabolisms are more likely to contend with the medication buildup that exacerbates side effects.



5 WAYS TO BOOST NEUROPLASTICITY

You often hear about the importance of exercising your body, but exercising your brain is also crucial — particularly for healthy aging.

“Neuroplasticity is the capacity of the nerve cells in your brain to adapt to different circumstances,” explains Rob Glick, Life Time’s senior director of group fitness programming innovation. “Creating new pathways in your brain may help mitigate cognitive and motor decline symptoms associated with aging.”

Glick suggests the following five ways to help keep your brain strong.



1. Meet someone new.

Social interactions are not a luxury; they’re critical to our well-being. Different kinds of relationships can fulfill a variety of needs and goals. But creating new connections in your brain can be as easy as meeting someone new and learning their name.

YOUR GUT MICROBIOME on Alcohol

Teen Vulnerability

Age may be another risk factor in how cannabis interferes with antidepressants. While it's not yet clear whether adolescents are more biologically vulnerable than adults to a negative interaction, there are unique risk factors for modern teens — one being that they use cannabis more than prior generations did. Rates of marijuana use among teens are the highest they've been in 30 years.

Because of their still-developing brains (and the sense of invincibility that comes with being young), teenagers are generally less likely to consider the long-term consequences of their actions. They may then dismiss concerns around the detrimental effects of marijuana because smoking offers immediate relief.

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC



DELVE DEEPER

For a more detailed version of this article, see [ELmag.com/antidepressants](https://www.ELmag.com/antidepressants).

Does imbibing help or harm those trillions of microbes working in your gut microbiome to keep you healthy?

Past research has largely focused on people who regularly drink to excess. Several studies have shown that among heavy drinkers, alcohol may lead to an altered microbiome and dysbiosis — microbial imbalances that include an excess of harmful bacteria or fungi, loss of “good” bacteria, and loss of microbial diversity.

In addition, one study found that excessive alcohol consumption may increase intestinal permeability, in which toxins and other unwanted particles are allowed to pass through the thin, delicate layer of the gut and into the bloodstream. This can lead to leaky gut syndrome and associated conditions, including allergies, arthritis, asthma, and more.

That same study also suggests that an unhealthy gut might in turn even contribute to cravings for more alcohol.

But what if you drink only in moderation? This means consuming two drinks or fewer daily for men and one or fewer for women, according to the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services.

Researchers believe that those who drink low-to-moderate amounts have more diverse gut microbiomes — which is usually associated with a healthy gut — compared with people who abstain. But another study, involving animal models, found that even a little alcohol can cause inflammation in the body. And a further study states that even light drinking can slightly increase the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease.

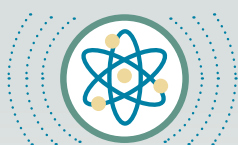
While there is no clear consensus on alcohol's health benefits or detriments, research does suggest that drinking less is best.

— MD



2. Dance to music.

Dance and coordinated movements to music can create and strengthen synapses in the brain. “New movement patterns, music patterns, and the act of listening all come together for increased brain-cell connections,” says Glick.



3. Try a new activity.

Consider a new hobby, sport, or musical instrument: Think about something that interests you or that you've always wanted to do and give it a go. Novel experiences push you out of your comfort zone and inspire the neurons in your brain to fire.



4. Play brain games.

Exercising your brain can be as straightforward as playing games or learning new fun facts. For example, try to memorize a sequence of five new words, or look up today's date to learn about something that happened on this day in history.



5. Rest. Stress and a lack of sleep can impair your cognitive functioning. Prioritizing high-quality sleep and mitigating stress are key to brain health. Sleep supports many aspects of cognition, including memory, problem solving, and emotional processing. 🧠

— EMILY EWEN

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STAY STRONG YOUR WHOLE LIFE LONG

Exercise physiologist and nutrition scientist Stacy Sims, MSC, PhD,
on what women need to know to age powerfully.

BY JILL PATTON, NBC-HWC

DURING HER UNDERGRADUATE DAYS

rowing crew and her years as an elite triathlete and cyclist, Stacy Sims, MSC, PhD, followed the standard training and dietary regimens — ones largely based on research on male athletes. The outcomes were frustrating: She and her teammates couldn't attain successes comparable to those of the men.

"I was learning things about exercise physiology and metabolism in my undergrad classes that didn't make sense for us female rowers," the exercise physiologist and nutrition scientist recalls.

"I couldn't find anything in textbooks or journal articles about how to maximize women's athletic performance, and no one could tell me why we were putting in the same training as the men but not seeing the same results. I was told, 'Well, women are an anomaly. We don't know why you're not responding.'"

Published research on boosting female athletic performance lagged far behind that of male athletes. So Sims and her peers set out to find answers on their own. For Sims, that ultimately meant leaving elite competition and entering the lab.

Her research at Stanford University and the AUT Sports Performance Research Institute New Zealand is focused on her powerful premise that "women are not small men." This informs her books *Roar: Match Your Food and Fitness to Your Unique Female Physiology for Optimum Performance, Great Health, and a Strong Body for Life* and *Next Level: Your Guide to Kicking Ass, Feeling Great, and Crushing Goals Through Menopause and Beyond*.

We asked Sims how active women of all ages can benefit from what she's learned.



Q&A

WITH STACY SIMS, MSC, PhD

EXPERIENCE LIFE • Why do you think women were excluded from much of the athletic research in the past?

STACY SIMS • There's this idea that women are more complicated to study due to the hormonal changes in our monthly cycles and across our lifespans. But women aren't more complicated — we're more complex. In any scientific design, you can accommodate complexity.

The real problem is, as most of the studies were developed, women were never in the room. If we could change history and women had been the ones who started it all, our fluctuation in hormones would have been accounted for.

So now we're pushing to look at the complexity of women's bodies: What are our different hormone profiles? Are we reproductive or perimenopausal? Are we on hormonal or nonhormonal contraception? These add layers of complexity, but it doesn't mean we're complicated.

EL • What are some misconceptions you encounter about female bodies when it comes to nutrition advice?

SS • One of my frustrations is the advice about fasting and low-carbohydrate, low-food intake: It's all based on male data and can be damaging for women.

I'm a physiologist, so I look at brain signaling. Women have two areas in the hypothalamus that are supersensitive to nutrition: one is specific for appetite control; the other is specific for endocrine control. [Editor's note: Men have one area that regulates both.]

Low-calorie intake downregulates an important neuropeptide in both areas of the female hypothalamus, affecting our immune system, our thyroid, and other hormones. We get wired and tired, which is our brains saying, "We need fuel!"

EL • What common fitness advice for women do you wish would go away?

SS • The advice around zone 2 training. The general consensus is for the bulk of exercise to be in heart-rate zone 2, which is steady and conversationally paced. This doesn't consider sex differences — and has an impact on women's longevity.



Women need to do high-intensity work that is short and sharp in order to produce lactate. We know now that lactate is not a waste product but is used by the brain as fuel; this lactate use is an important consideration for reducing cognitive decline and other factors too.

High-intensity activity is especially important for women in the menopause transition who are losing their sex hormones. It improves certain cardiovascular outcomes — like blood-vessel compliance and heart-rate responses to postural shifts and energy demands — and it boosts cardiac-muscle integrity.

We still need to do zone 2 training, but it shouldn't be prioritized to the exclusion of high-intensity training.

EL • How have your research interests evolved over time?

SS • We need more research on women who are active and healthy but struggling to understand how their bodies are changing. Hormones have a big impact on tissue integrity, tendon integrity, how our muscles move, and how our joints move. We need to know how to reassess how we move and how our tissues are responding in perimenopause and beyond.

Meanwhile, my daughter is 12, and I'm interested in understanding the developmental phases of girls through puberty so we can keep them in sports. It's not that they're disinterested — it's that their bodies are changing and no one's saying to them, "Look, your biomechanics have changed, and your center of gravity has changed. But we can reteach you how to run, how to jump, and how to land."

We have to educate PE teachers to teach functional movement to girls and not just throw them in with the boys or, worse, have them benched as a substitute.

EL • Do you have foundational advice for women throughout their lifespan?

SS • I often talk about the "big rocks." The first big rock is sleep. If you have good sleep, you have better metabolic control and better energy and are more resilient to stress. Sleep hygiene is important — a cool, dark room and no screens two hours before bed. If you're still having problems, we can look at adding L-theanine or rhodiola or some other adaptogens to help.

Another big rock is making sure you're getting protein throughout the day, plus lots of fruits and vegetables.

Timing matters too: We generally need more food in the beginning of the day — starting a half hour after waking, when cortisol typically peaks — then taper down and limit eating after dinner. This can help us get better recovery during sleep, reduce total body inflammation, support our mitochondria, and lose body fat.

When it comes to the movement rock, regardless of age, women should strength train. We need to lift! Strength training is linked to neuroplasticity. It supports metabolism and helps with cardiovascular health. It improves proprioception and balance.

EL • How can women advocate for their fitness and health when faced with confusing and often bad advice?

SS • If you see something that's new and trendy or if you're doing something that doesn't feel right, pause and try to find out where that information came from. . . . There *is* data on women. We just need to find it and dig it out. 📌

JILL PATTON, NBC-HWC, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor and an integrative health and wellness coach.



KEEP READING

For more on zone 2 training, see "**Low, Slow Cardio**" on page 32.

For more on high-intensity training, see [ELmag.com/hiit](https://www.experiencelife.com/hiit).

For more on cycle syncing your routine, see [ELmag.com/cyclesyncfitness](https://www.experiencelife.com/cyclesyncfitness).

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BY *EXPERIENCE LIFE* STAFF

WHY

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HOW

All reading is good for you, but reading from an actual book or a magazine (compared with reading on a screen) can help your brain comprehend content. Set a daily goal — whether it's a page or a chapter a day — and carve out the time that works for you.

TAKE ACTION

Want to make your reading challenge a social affair? Learn about the benefits of joining a book club — and find more brain-boosting tips — at [ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit](https://www.experiencelife.com/onehealthyhabit).



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Beyond the Finish Line

A former professional cyclist reflects on his decision to leave the sport behind and return to a "regular" life.



BY FABIO CALABRIA

From left: Fabio Calabria cycling in 2023; Fabio and his girlfriend, Cassie, with their dog, Lucas.

I BROKE AHEAD of the pack of cyclists pushing through the desert wind. We were in stage 3 of the 2019 United Arab Emirates Tour, a seven-stage road race through the dunes and cities of the UAE. My job in this stage was to get into a breakaway to protect a teammate who had pulled ahead and was competing for the tour's intermediate sprint jersey.

My teammate finished the stage with the most points in the intermediate sprint category and got to wear the jersey in the next stage of the tour. We repeated the feat together in stage 5, and he eventually achieved the second-best overall intermediate sprint score. I felt good about my role in his success and about my performance. I headed back to the United States to prepare for a race in Italy a couple of weeks later.

Shortly after I got home, however, I received an email from my team manager informing me I wouldn't be competing in Italy. Racers had been required to weigh in before and after every stage of the UAE Tour, and — despite my performance — he believed I was too heavy to race. I'm 5 feet 4 inches tall and had weighed in at 125 pounds.

I was gutted. Was it time for me to step away from pro cycling?

A DIFFICULT START

My relationship with cycling goes back to my roots in Canberra, Australia, where I started competing in club races at age 11. I was small and unathletic, but I loved it. I dreamed of becoming a professional cyclist.

Although I was never officially diagnosed with an eating disorder, **I developed a toxic relationship with food and a distorted view of my body.**

That dream was put to the test when I became seriously ill at the age of 13. We later recognized the symptoms of type 1 diabetes — unquenchable thirst, excessive urination, weight loss, exhaustion — but at the time my parents didn't know what was wrong. When I finally went to the hospital, I felt so terrible that I thought I was dying. In fact, I felt so bad that I was OK with dying.

I slipped into a coma for three days. When I woke up, I felt so much better than even when my doctor told

me I had diabetes, my first thought was, *I'm so happy! I'm not dying!*

My mom sat me down and explained that everyone's got something they need to do to take care of themselves and survive. She can't function without glasses, she said. My grandfather needed medications for blood pressure and cholesterol. I would have to take insulin, but that didn't make me different from anyone else.

My doctor told me there wasn't much that I *couldn't* do — but added, "You might not be able to be an astronaut, if that's what you were hoping for."

I didn't want to be an astronaut. I wanted to be a cyclist.

My doctor helped me figure out insulin dosages and treatment schedules. He even gave me his cell number and said, "If you're ever at a race and you don't know what to do, just call me, and we'll figure it out."

It took time to rebuild my strength after being so sick, but by the time I turned 16, I'd gone from being an average competitor to being at the front of races. After high school, I raced on amateur teams in Italy, and in 2007, at 20, I signed my first contract with a U.S.-based team.

A HEAVY BURDEN

My manager's decision to sideline me after the UAE Tour was not the first time my weight had been an issue in my career. Although it's starting to change, the theory in much of the cycling world has long been that lighter racers are more competitive because moving a lighter body requires less energy output. No matter how well you performed, a manager's advice was always, "Maybe lose another kilo."

Because I'm short, I was expected to specialize in climbing up hills and encouraged to be as light as possible. Early in my career, I raced at a weight as low as 105 pounds to try to improve my performance. But my physiology isn't that of a climber: I'm broad-shouldered and my bone structure is not particularly fine. Every race I've ever won has been a sprint. And even as a sprinter, I raced at less than 120 pounds for years.

The irony is that I raced on a team composed of athletes with type 1 diabetes; our mission was to demonstrate what people with type 1 can achieve. We were held up as examples of a healthy lifestyle, but I had to do some seriously unhealthy things to keep my weight down. This included severe caloric restriction (a team doctor once advised me to weigh my lettuce-and-carrot salads) and manipulating my hunger hormones through insulin dosages.

I was anything but healthy. Although I was never officially diagnosed with an eating disorder, I developed a toxic relationship with food and a distorted view of my body.

On top of this, I felt disposable to the team: I was only ever worth as much as my last race. If I performed well, I was king of the world. But that could flip from one race to the next.

I was proud of my career, but it had taken its toll. I didn't have many days off. I missed important family events. I was away from home a lot, and even when I was home, I wasn't *really* there because I was exhausted or preoccupied. In short, I wasn't the best version of myself.

Fortunately, there were people — friends and a few professionals — who encouraged me to take better care of myself. As I matured as a racer and a person, I finally started to listen to them.

After the UAE Tour, I'd had enough. I decided to finish the season and retire. It was time for me to put my health and well-being first.

Part of that transition would entail finding a new way to support myself — letting go of the professional cyclist part of my identity. But I knew the hardest part would be unlearning the thoughts and behaviors I'd adopted around food and eating.

DE-PROFESSIONALIZING

It's not uncommon for professional athletes to struggle in retirement. We must find new careers, new identities. We have to adopt new lifestyles, discovering ways to spend the extra time and energy we once spent on training.

Some of us have to acknowledge and work through dysfunctional habits and perspectives we developed to maintain elite status. Five years in, I'm proud of the progress I've made.

I live in Tulsa, Okla., with my girlfriend, Cassie. She and I met while cycling, and the sport is a big part of our lives. (As we did last fall, we'll be racing the Life Time Big Sugar Classic this October.) I've learned a new trade in auto-body repair and have settled into the rhythm of "normal" life.

Learning to eat without fixating on weight has been my biggest struggle, but I remember my mom's wisdom: Even though other people can't see it, there are always things we need to do to take care of ourselves.

With Cassie's help, I'm taking care of my mental health around food. She understands my thought processes and has helped me shift my thinking. Being able to vocalize my concerns to her — and to close friends I trust — has helped.

It's taken time, but I've learned I can eat regular meals even on days I don't ride. I'm learning to relax as my body finds its natural weight.

I know my struggle around food will be with me for a long time. But I also know how much better I feel in my body and mind. I don't have stress around food these days. I can enjoy my passion for training and competing without having it take over my well-being — and I'm excited for whatever comes next. 🍌

Fabio's Top Takeaways

1.

Build your own team.

"Surround yourself with people who care about you and want the best for you."

2.

Choose your own metrics.

"Control what you can and don't get beaten down by what you can't — it's only a failure if you don't learn from it."

3.

Trust your body.

"Your body is good at telling you what it needs. If you're hungry, eat. If you're thirsty, drink. If you're craving a big steak, you probably need it!"



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Have a transformational healthy-living tale of your own? Share it with us at

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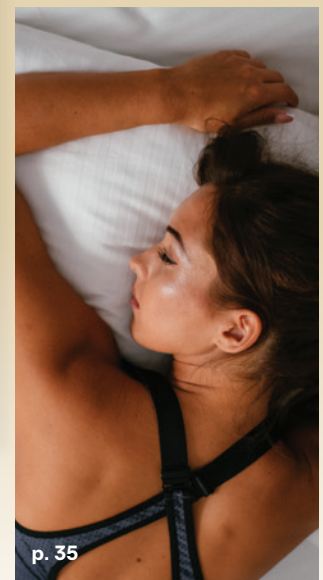
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REAL FITNESS



YOUR GRIP STRENGTH is a reliable indicator of longevity and general health. Beyond its functional importance, greater grip strength is associated with better cardiovascular health and fewer instances of depression. Start improving your head-to-toe strength with our grip-focused workout on page 26.



Get a Grip!

Build head-to-toe strength — and invest in your longevity — with this grip-focused workout.

BY ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS

AS MUSCLES GO, the hands, forearms, and wrists don't get much love in the gym — but it may be time to change that.

"Grip strength is so important for function in daily activities," says personal trainer and strength coach Ryan McDowell, CSCS. Carrying children, schlepping groceries, opening jars, and lifting suitcases are just a few of the common tasks requiring hand and forearm strength.

Beyond its functional importance, grip strength is a reliable indicator of longevity and general health. Studies have shown that greater grip strength is associated with better cardiovascular health and fewer instances of depression. While fortifying your grip may not prevent a heart attack or cure a mental health issue, being able to open a pickle jar with ease could reveal clues about your overall well-being.

Luckily, training these muscles doesn't require more work than what you might already be doing. Many of the best exercises for your grip also build strength in your legs, core, back, chest, and shoulders.

"A lot of grip-focused exercises mimic hard, manual labor," says McDowell, who has trained contact- and combat-sport athletes who need grip strength to compete. "That leads to an increase not just in grip strength but in balance and overall work capability."

To that end, he offers this tough, full-body routine that builds serious hand, finger, and forearm strength.

Beyond its functional importance, grip strength is a **reliable indicator of longevity and general health.**



The Workout

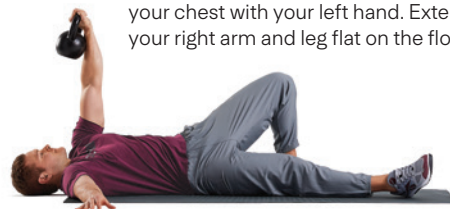
- Begin each session with a five- to 10-minute warm-up of easy cardio or calisthenics.
- For the first move, perform the designated number of reps on one side, rest briefly, then switch to the other side. Rest until you feel ready for your next set (30 to 90 seconds) and repeat until you have completed all sets and reps listed.
- For the subsequent exercises (marked with number-letter combinations like 2A and 2B), perform one set of the A move, followed by a 30- to 90-second rest, then perform one set of the B move, followed by another rest. Return to the first exercise and continue alternating moves until you've completed all assigned sets for both moves.
- At the end of your workout, cool down with some stretching, easy cardio, or breathwork.
- Perform this workout one or two times per week, resting at least one day between sessions. You can alternate this with the bonus workout (see ELmag.com/gripworkout) for up to four workouts per week.

1.

TURKISH GET-UP

Lying on your back, bend your left knee and press a light kettlebell straight over your chest with your left hand. Extend your right arm and leg flat on the floor.

a.



b.



"Punch" the kettlebell toward the ceiling as you roll onto your right forearm. Keep your gaze on the weight.

c.



Continue pressing the weight overhead to sit up, and plant your right palm behind you.

d.



Keeping your eyes on the kettlebell and your right leg straight, ground through your right hand and left foot, and lift your hips off the floor as high as possible.

e.



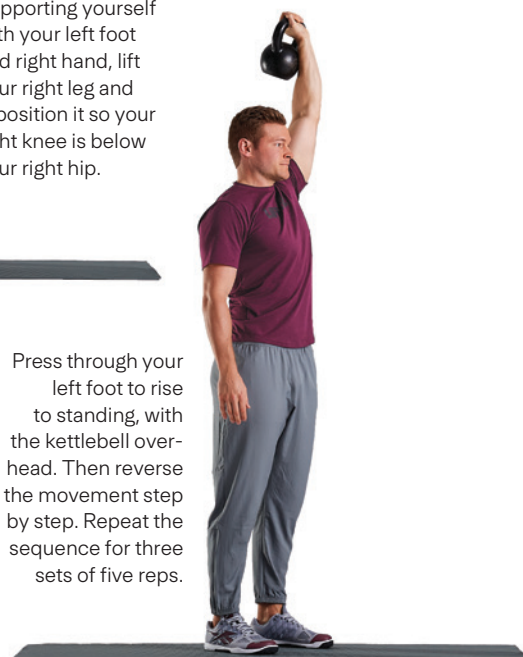
Supporting yourself with your left foot and right hand, lift your right leg and reposition it so your right knee is below your right hip.

f.



Shift your weight to lift your right hand off the floor so that you are in a half-kneeling stance.

g.



Press through your left foot to rise to standing, with the kettlebell overhead. Then reverse the movement step by step. Repeat the sequence for three sets of five reps.

2A.

CONVENTIONAL DEADLIFT

2A + 2B = 4 Total Rounds

Stand behind a barbell loaded with medium-to-heavy weight. Hinge your hips back to reach down and grasp the barbell.

Keeping your chest up and arms straight, press through your feet and rise to standing. Reverse the movement to lower the bar to the floor.

Repeat for eight reps.



2B.

ALTERNATING DUMBBELL PRESS

Stand holding two medium-to-heavy dumbbells with a neutral grip at shoulder height. Press one dumbbell straight overhead.

Lower that dumbbell, then immediately press the opposite weight overhead. Repeat, alternating sides, to complete eight reps per side.



3A.

RING ROW

3A + 3B = 3 Total Rounds

Stand facing the anchor point of a pair of rings. With the straps pulled taut, position your feet so your body forms about a 45-degree angle with the floor.



Keeping your body straight, bend your elbows and retract your shoulder blades to raise your chest toward the rings. Straighten your arms to reverse the movement with control. Perform 15 reps.

3B.

SANDBAG WALKING LUNGE

Stand holding a medium-to-heavy sandbag across your upper back and shoulders. Take a long step forward with your right foot. Bend both knees until your left knee lightly taps the floor.



Forcefully push off your back foot so you can take a long stride forward with your left leg, and then descend into a lunge on the other side.

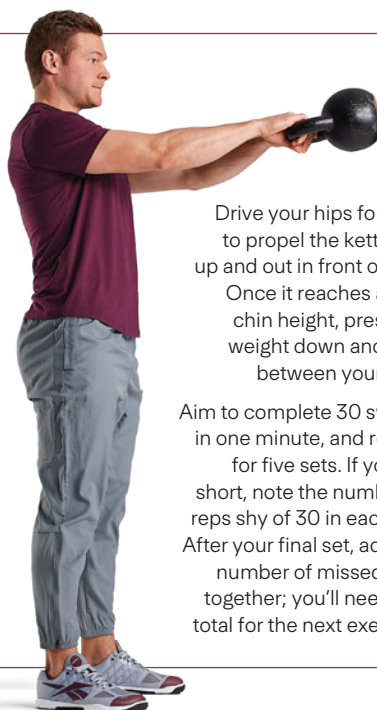
Continue lunging forward, alternating feet, until you have covered 15 yards.

4.

RUSSIAN KETTLEBELL SWING



Set a kettlebell about 2 feet in front of you and start a timer for one minute. Hinge forward to grasp the weight and powerfully hike it high between your legs.



Drive your hips forward to propel the kettlebell up and out in front of you. Once it reaches about chin height, press the weight down and high between your legs.

Aim to complete 30 swings in one minute, and repeat for five sets. If you fall short, note the number of reps shy of 30 in each set. After your final set, add the number of missed reps together; you'll need this total for the next exercise.



GET THE BONUS WORKOUT

For another full-body, grip-focused workout, visit ELmag.com/gripworkout.



5.

BONUS BURPEES

If you missed any kettlebell swings in the previous exercise, double your total to get your rep count of burpees.

Begin standing. Moving with control, place your hands on the floor and jump (or step) your feet back into a high plank position. Jump (or step) your feet back toward your hands. Jump up, if you are able, raising your hands overhead. ➡



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Actively reach your sit bones up and back.

Actively engage your arms and shoulders while drawing your shoulders away from your ears.

Draw your heels toward the floor as you straighten your legs; go only as far as your range of motion allows.

Bend your knees as much as you need to lengthen your spine.

Relax your head between your arms; avoid craning your neck.

Spread your fingers wide and press actively through your knuckles (not your palms).

Downward-Facing Dog

This foundational yoga pose is a great full-body stretch. Learn how to adapt it for your unique body.

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

ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA

— known as downward-facing dog or, simply, down dog in the West — is a foundational asana, or yoga pose. Hands and feet on the mat, with hips high in the air, the inverted V shape is a highly recognizable posture.

You're likely to encounter it during yoga classes, where it is sometimes used as a transitional pose and resting posture, as well as during nonyogic training. Its ubiquity isn't surprising when you consider its varied benefits: Down dog provides a full-body stretch while strengthening the upper body and core. By

lowering the head below your heart, it's also considered a circulation-boosting inversion.

To enjoy these benefits, it's important to do it correctly. "Correct" in this context does not refer to some aspirational expression of the pose. Rather, it's a call to understand its intention and embrace modifications that can support the intended alignment.

This requires a mindset shift if you're someone who normally strives to achieve a singular definition of perfect form in your fitness endeavors. But opening your mind to the possi-

bility that modifications can be more "correct" than muscling your way into a posture can offer benefits for your yoga practice and beyond.

So, what is the intention of adho mukha svanasana? Because it stretches and strengthens, downward-facing dog provides an opportunity to find stability and flexibility — solidity and spaciousness — in both the body and mind.

What you need from the pose can change from day to day, and even over the course of a session, making a willingness to adjust and readjust a continual practice.

INSTRUCTIONS

1.

Begin in a modified tabletop pose with your hands slightly in front of your shoulders and knees under your hips.

2.

On an exhale, lift your knees and reach your hips toward the ceiling. Press your hamstrings back and let your heels get heavy.

3.

Simultaneously engage your shoulder blades and draw them back toward your hips. Avoid rounding your spine.

4.

Pedal your feet and make any other necessary adjustments, then find stillness. Hold this position for 10 breaths.



MIX UP THE MOVE

Learn about modifying downward-facing dog at ELmag.com/downdog.



LOW SLOW CARDIO

Boost your performance and overall health and fitness with zone 2 training.

BY LAUREN BEDOSKY

IF YOU THINK EFFECTIVE

cardio training requires fast-paced, all-out bursts of hard effort that leave you panting, sweaty, and sore, we've got news for you: Dialing back your intensity — at least some of the time — via zone 2 training can notably improve your overall performance and health.

A consistent regimen of slow-paced, low-intensity cardio, along the lines of an easy jog or relaxed bike ride, has been shown to improve endurance, heart health, and even insulin sensitivity.

In other words, taking it easy — or, at least, easier — a few hours each week is a worthwhile investment in your long-term fitness.

THE SCIENCE OF ZONE 2

Just how easy are we talking? Zone 2 sits in the comfortable space between easy and hard: It's a low- to moderate-intensity level of 60 to 70 percent of your maximum heart rate.

Heart-rate training is based on five zones, or thresholds, that correspond to how many beats per minute your heart is pumping relative to its maximum capacity, explains Life Time dynamic personal training director Jeff Rosga, NASM-CPT, NASM-PES, CES, BCS.

In zone 1, your heart is pumping at a minimal percentage of its capacity; this would be a warm-up pace that can be maintained for a long period of time. On the other end of the spectrum is zone 5, which maxes out your heart rate and is a very high intensity that can only be sustained for a short period.

"Zone 2 is considered aerobic," says Rosga, meaning your body relies mainly on fats, carbohydrates, and oxygen for fuel. This is the level of training during which the heart is able to deliver plenty of oxygenated blood to the muscles.

At this intensity, your cardiovascular system is benefitting from several

notable adaptations, says integrative cardiologist Mimi Guarneri, MD, author of *The Heart Speaks*. Zone 2 training strengthens your heart muscle. And the more you train at this intensity, she says, the more efficient your body will become at using oxygen during exercise, a measurement known as aerobic capacity.

Greater aerobic capacity, also known as VO_2 max, is associated with a wide range of benefits, from improved heart health and blood-sugar regulation to greater longevity.

Additionally, increasing your aerobic capacity improves cellular function, which boosts the flow of oxygenated blood to your muscle tissues, prompting your muscles to make more and larger mitochondria. The powerhouses of cells, mitochondria are organelles that use oxygen to create adenosine triphosphate, which is the fuel that makes your muscles contract.

The more mitochondria you have, the more oxygen you'll be able to use.

This gives your cells a robust and stable energy supply, boosting stamina and warding off fatigue.

“You’ll be able to go farther or longer — or both — without tiring,” explains Life Time master trainer and nutrition coach Lindsay Ogden, CPT.

BEYOND ENDURANCE

Though improving endurance is a major benefit of zone 2 training, it’s not the only one. The lower intensity reduces strains on your connective tissues and nervous system, making overexercising less likely, says Rosga. It can also help you recover by decreasing your body’s fight-or-flight responses, improving resting heart rate, and enhancing blood flow.

This type of training is also associated with numerous general health markers and longevity, especially when included in a routine that incorporates strength training.

“Zone 2 exercise decreases blood pressure and triglyceride levels and improves mental well-being,” says Guarneri. Moreover, she explains, zone 2 training enhances glucose regulation and insulin sensitivity because the increased number of mitochondria supports the body’s ability to process glucose and regulate blood sugar.

Finally, notes Ogden, zone 2 training is scalable to the individual and easy to do consistently. “It’s sustainable.”

Do these benefits mean you should abandon your high-intensity interval training (HIIT)? Not at all, says Rosga. If you want to improve your performance, strength, and conditioning, it’s not a matter of either-or — it’s both.

“It’s important to realize that both longer, low-intensity [zone 2] cardio and HIIT help develop your energy systems in different ways,” explains Joel Jamieson, CSCS, a go-to trainer for Navy SEALs and pro athletes. “There shouldn’t be a debate about which one is better — they lead to different adaptations, and each has unique benefits.”

YOUR ZONE 2 TRAINING PLAN

Find your zone. Figuring out what your zone 2 effort feels like is essential. The activity and pace required for you to reach zone 2 depends on your fitness level and the types of exercise you regularly do.

“An elite runner may be in zone 2 while jogging a nine-minute mile, whereas the same exercise and pace could place someone who only lifts weights in zone 3 or 4,” Ogden says.

The most accurate way to determine and track your zone is by taking a cardio test known as an Active Metabolic Assessment (AMA) and then using a heart-rate monitor (preferably with a chest strap) during your training. (Learn more about AMA testing at ELmag.com/ama.)

There’s also a simple and reliable low-tech approach: Check in with your breathing. You’ll know you’re in zone 2 during exercise if you can breathe comfortably through your nose only, or if you can speak aloud without getting breathless. (If you’re training alone, try to speak a few words out loud to test your breathing; if you’re working out with a buddy, you’ll be able to maintain a light conversation in zone 2.)

If nasal breathing becomes heavy and uncomfortable, or you need to switch to mouth breathing, you’re creeping into zone 3.

Set your schedule. To achieve the effects of zone 2 training, building up training volume is key. That’s because “longer, slower training helps develop the capillary network that is responsible for delivering the oxygen supplied by the heart to the working muscles,” explains Jamieson. “It takes a higher volume than you’re likely to do with HIIT for this to happen.”

Rosga recommends at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity activity (zones 1–3). A good rule of thumb is 40 to 60 minutes of

zone 2 training at a stretch, aiming for two to four hours per week. (Exercise newbies are encouraged to start with shorter zone 2 sessions and gradually build up their volume over time.)

To balance zone 2 training with HIIT training, Rosga advises spacing out your days of high-intensity work throughout the week and targeting 75 minutes per week of vigorous activity (zones 3–5). For those individuals looking for the right balance in their cardiovascular fitness plan, Rosga recommends using the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of your weekly time should fall in the lower intensity zones and 20 percent of your time should focus on high-intensity work.

And, Guarneri notes, don’t forget to include resistance training in your weekly training mix. “Building muscle is a key ingredient for longevity,” she says.

Choose your exercises. You can use many exercise modalities for zone 2 training, but cardio options like walking, cycling, rowing, swimming, hiking, and jogging are likely your best bets.

“To get the maximum benefits, you want to stay in zone 2 without much change in effort or speed,” Ogden says. Though resistance training and mind–body practices like yoga are vital components of a well-rounded exercise program, they don’t allow you to maintain your intensity long enough to reap the benefits of zone 2 training, she adds.

Track your progress. A lower resting heart rate and improved heart-rate variability are indicators that your cardio endurance is improving. You might notice that you can maintain your zone 2 effort for a longer distance or duration. Or you’ll find that you can do a harder activity (say, jogging instead of walking) without spiking your heart rate. 📍



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



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Give Your Body a Break

Do you need a recovery day?

BY LAUREN BEDOSKY

YOU MIGHT PUSH HARD

during exercise, but it's the time between workouts when the real work happens.

"Your body doesn't become stronger on the days you work out; in fact, it becomes weaker," says exercise physiologist Todd Buckingham, PhD, a visiting professor of exercise science at Michigan's Grand Valley State University. "It's only when we rest and recover that the body builds itself up to be stronger than it was before."

One of the best tools for recovery — along with adequate nutrition, restful sleep, and stress management — is active recovery.

Active recovery encompasses any low-stress movement that doesn't cause additional muscle damage, explains Samantha McKinney, RD, personal trainer and national program manager at Life Time.

Lower-intensity cardio, gentle yoga and mobility training, and lower-intensity resistance training are all great options to help increase circulation, lubricate your joints, prevent tightness, and encourage your body to drop into the parasympathetic state, or recovery zone.

Resting heart rate (RHR) and heart-rate variability (HRV) are two objective markers that can help you assess the state of your nervous system and determine whether you need a day to recover.

(Learn more about the role of RHR and HRV in recovery — and how to track both — at ELmag.com/recoverydays.)



There are also several subjective markers worth considering, including these.

1. You did a hard workout the day before. While "hard" is a subjective term, it generally involves working at a perceived effort of at least 8 out of 10. It's usually a good idea to follow an intense workout with an active recovery day and limit the number of hard workouts you do each week.

"The average person really shouldn't work out 'hard' more than one or two days a week, let alone multiple days in a row," Buckingham notes. Too many intense workouts can make it difficult for your body to recover, leading to performance plateaus or injury.

2. You feel sore and fatigued. Delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) is a common side effect of exercise, often felt during the first couple of weeks of a new training program. It's a sore, aching, painful feeling in the muscles that develops 12 to 24 hours after a workout as a result of microscopic muscle damage.

DOMS can range from mild to severe, explains McKinney. If you experience moderate to severe DOMS, consider taking an active recovery day (or several) to avoid further stressing your muscles before they've had a chance to recover from your previous workout.

3. You're moody and irritable. Exercise is linked with improvements in mood. But if you overdo it without appropriate recovery, you can experience the opposite effect, says McKinney.

The stress of exercise can elevate your stress hormones — mainly cortisol. When levels of this hormone remain high for a prolonged time, it can cause mood swings and uncharacteristic levels of irritability. So, if you notice you have a short fuse, one or more active recovery days could be in order.

4. Your performance has stalled.

"If you're not taking recovery days, the body will be unable to fully recover and absorb the training that you're putting it through," Buckingham says. Over time, you may see your exercise performance plateau or decline.

We all sometimes complete a workout feeling that we didn't perform as well as we'd hoped, so it can be tough to know the difference between an off day and stalled results. However, as a general rule, a week's worth of subpar workouts is a good indicator that you need extra recovery, Buckingham says.

5. You're not sleeping well. Sleep is a requirement for adequate recovery, notes McKinney. It's needed to metabolically support muscle protein synthesis and optimize levels of testosterone, human growth hormone, and other rebuilding hormones.

At the same time, sleep can suffer if too-frequent, high-intensity, or long-duration exercise without reciprocal recovery strategies is putting too much stress on your body. Sleep deprivation can compromise endurance and strength and make workouts feel harder than usual.

If you're struggling to get adequate sleep, it could be a sign that you need to reassess your recovery.

Buckingham and McKinney recommend that you track these subjective markers daily. Using a journal or digital log, rate your soreness, mood, workout performance, and sleep quality. If you notice an abrupt change for the worse lasting a week or more, consider it time to revisit your recovery routine.

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



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Intuitive Movement

Our fitness editor reflects on learning to listen to her body during exercise.

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

THE FIRST TIME I tried moving intuitively — that is, exercising in a way that honors my physical and psychological needs rather than as a way to control my body and mind — it didn't feel intuitive at all.

I'd spent so long believing that exercise was a tool to manipulate and fix a body I understood to be imperfect, to shrink it down to a size that fit the world I lived in. As a teenager in the '90s, I exercised for washboard abs and a thigh gap, then hid myself away under baggy sweats and loose jeans; the way I saw it, there was always more to lose.

If I could have exercised my way into oblivion, I would have.

By the time I heard the phrase "intuitive exercise," I was 29 years old and convinced that I couldn't listen to my body because it wasn't talking.

In truth, my body was screaming: I'd stopped getting my period, my hair was falling out, and I suffered from hot flashes and insomnia.

Deafened by the voice inside my head that insisted more exercise (and less food) would solve all my problems, I couldn't hear the cries for help. It took moving halfway across the country for a new job before my intuition found the opportunity to cut through the noise of my inner critic.

Settled in my new home, I backed into the practice of intuitive movement at my neighborhood strength gym. "How are you doing today?" the coaches would ask each member when we arrived.

Upon checking in for class, we'd fill out an optional readiness questionnaire that surveyed our energy, mood, focus, stress, hunger, and more. And each workout included options for different movement variations that we "tested" using biofeedback checks like range-of-motion assessments and heart-rate-variability tracking.

The entire approach was based on the idea that every stressor — no matter how big or small — pushes us toward either better or worse. What constitutes better or worse one day will not necessarily hold true the next.

At first, it felt like I was outsourcing my training to some invisible, meta-physical force. It seemed as arbitrary as conjuring a jinn to tell me how to work out based on their supernatural whim.

Over time, I grew to understand that I was doing the opposite. I was *insourcing* my movement to my higher self, the part of me that was in tune with my psychophysical landscape, rather than trying to exert control over it.

I've been practicing intuitive movement for more than a decade — and it is no error to call it a practice. Just because something is intuitive doesn't make it easy. Sometimes the noise of the world and my inner childhood critic threaten to drown out my intuition and disconnect me from myself.

Listening to my body requires paying attention. It requires reminding myself that my body is talking to me. Over the years, I've collected a box of tools — a four-part checklist — that helps me reconnect. Here's what works for me.

Reconnection Checklist

☐ **Check in.** Before working out, I ask myself, *How am I feeling right now?*

There was a learning curve to answering this honestly. My default answer is *I feel fine*. But assessing how I'm feeling physically, emotionally, mentally, and energetically gives me a strong foundation to start exactly where I am.

☐ **Start small.** I commit to five- or 10-minute workout "snacks" — mini servings of movement — followed by another check-in: *Now how do I feel?* I often feel good and want to continue, but sometimes I don't. Giving myself permission to change direction has bolstered my self-trust and intuition.

☐ **Find what feels good.** I didn't realize how much I associated exercise with punishment until I challenged myself to move in ways that felt good. If it feels good, it can't be good for me — right? But a workout doesn't have to be grueling, painful, or a chore to be effective. Suffering is not the only way (or even the best way) to get stronger, fitter, or healthier.

☐ **Just move.** One of the biggest stumbling blocks of my intuitive-movement journey was expecting my intuition to motivate me. But when I listened to my body after a long day of sitting, it rarely told me to move. I had a great aha moment when I realized that inertia isn't intuition. To move intuitively, I actually have to move.



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



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NUTS ARE A BONA FIDE SUPERFOOD, full of protein, healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals. As part of a healthy diet, they can lower the risk of high blood pressure and protect against heart disease and type 2 diabetes. And if all that isn't reason enough to love nuts, they're also delicious and versatile. Turn to page 50 to find three recipes starring some of our favorite nuts.

Pumping IRON

Iron is an essential mineral — yet too many of us aren't getting enough.

BY **STEPHANIE SOUCHERAY**

FORTIFIED WITH IRON — it's a phrase many of us may remember reading on the back of cereal boxes. But few of us probably stopped to contemplate why iron, a mineral found in the earth's crust, was also in our corn flakes.

Iron is an essential mineral that's necessary for dozens of bodily functions. We need it to survive, yet millions of Americans don't have enough, especially if they menstruate or consume a primarily plant-based diet.

Moreover, an estimated 5 million Americans have iron-deficiency anemia, a condition defined by an insufficient number of healthy red blood cells. (In some developing countries, more than half the total population has anemia.)

Iron's most important role is in the creation of those red blood cells. The mineral is a key component of the heme in hemoglobin, a protein that helps transport oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Because the human body doesn't make iron, it has to absorb it from iron-rich foods or supplements.

Anemia is a serious condition, causing fatigue, weakness, and shortness of breath. Left untreated, iron-deficiency anemia places stress on the heart and may even contribute to heart damage or heart failure.

Even less-than-optimal iron levels can cause a range of troublesome symptoms, so it's critical to maintain your stores of this vital mineral.

THE LOW-IRON RISK

Anemia is the result of the body receiving too little iron for too long. "If you're low on iron, the body will protect red blood cell production first," says Malcolm Munro, MD, FRCSC, FACOG, a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

This can have serious consequences for the entire body. "Iron is responsible for [many] enzymatic processes in the body, including those in [the] brain, the repair of DNA, and making liver enzymes," Munro explains.

And because we can't survive without oxygen transport, hemoglobin is maintained at the expense of all the other iron-dependent systems.

Prior to full-blown anemia, a host of other symptoms related to iron deficiency may appear: restless legs syndrome, exercise intolerance, brain fog, fatigue. All are good reasons to have your iron levels checked.

Anyone who menstruates is more likely to suffer from both anemia and suboptimal iron levels. And according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five U.S. women experiences especially heavy menstrual cycles, called menorrhagia, which can increase

anemia risk. "But it's been normalized, so much iron deficiency is missed in women," says Munro.

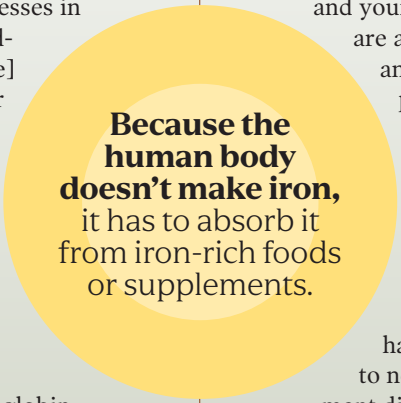
Recent studies suggest that more than one-third of premenopausal American women may be low in iron. Pregnancy can also increase the body's demand for iron.

Low iron has a cumulative effect, Munro points out.

Heavy periods in adolescence and young adulthood are a setup for anemia during pregnancy, and low iron in pregnancy poses risks to infant health. "Low maternal iron in pregnancy has been linked to neurodevelopment disorders," he explains. These include ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and learning disabilities.

Yet many healthcare practitioners don't know this. Until she was pregnant herself, functional-medicine practitioner Myrto Ashe, MD, MPH, didn't think about iron unless patients were anemic. "Suddenly, I felt out of breath going up stairs. I was so tired," she recalls. Shortness of breath is a sign of low iron; it signals a lack of oxygen in the blood.

After starting an iron supplement, Ashe's symptoms went away within a week. That's when she started taking iron seriously.



Because the human body doesn't make iron, it has to absorb it from iron-rich foods or supplements.

MEASURING IRON LEVELS

Ashe now tests iron, TIBC (total iron-binding capacity), and ferritin levels in all her patients. An iron test measures iron levels in the blood, while a ferritin test measures the protein that stores iron. Many practitioners, including Ashe and Munro, believe ferritin is a more useful indicator of overall iron levels than hemoglobin alone.

“Hemoglobin can be normal, because hemoglobin will be maintained at the expense of everything else. If ferritin is low, I know stores are low,” Munro says. “If ferritin readings are normal, I can assume hemoglobin is as well.”

Ashe says iron and TIBC levels help illuminate the Goldilocks situation of iron availability: Too little iron causes strain on organs and tissues. Too much iron can cause oxidative stress. Elevated ferritin levels may be caused by excess iron or excess inflammation — or both.

Munro recommends that anyone who menstruates get their ferritin checked regularly to ensure they’re in a good range. Still, the test results can be hard to parse.

Some healthcare providers believe the definition of iron deficiency used by the World Health Organization has thresholds that are too low for ferritin (less than 15 micrograms per liter) and hemoglobin (less than 12 grams per deciliter). Many researchers recommend that the low threshold for ferritin should be between 30 and 50, and hemoglobin should be above 13 to ensure there’s no possibility of anemia.

Both Munro and Ashe note that if you want an iron, TIBC, or ferritin test, you usually have to request it. During pregnancy, a hemoglobin test is typically done at the first prenatal visit in the first trimester, as low iron or anemia can pose a threat to the developing fetus and cause symptoms for the mother.

If you do take iron supplements, it’s still wise to test regularly. While it’s uncommon, too much supplemental iron can cause toxicity. “If you outstrip the carrying capacity of iron in your body, it can cause harm,” Ashe explains. Mild cases mainly lead to gastrointestinal upset, but iron toxicity can also damage the liver and brain.

Ashe has seen patients with too much iron. She recalls one patient who ate a lot of plant-based veggie burgers that contained more heme iron than beef does.

“Their iron was really high, harming their organs,” she recalls.

Too little iron causes strain on organs and tissues. Too much iron can cause oxidative stress.



THE CAUSES OF LOW IRON

It's not just menstruation that puts people at risk for iron deficiency. Eating plant-based diets, while good for human and planetary health, can make it harder to get enough iron, largely because we absorb iron more easily from meat than from plants.

In a review of studies on iron depletion that included vegetarians and nonvegetarians, authors found that up to 79 percent of the vegetarian women were deficient in iron; up to 29 percent of the vegetarian men had low levels.

Vegetarians and vegans can maintain healthy iron levels through diet, says Gregory Plotnikoff, MD, MTS, FACP, a functional-medicine practitioner in Minneapolis. "One doesn't have to have meat to get iron," he says, though it may require a more conscious effort.

He tests iron levels in most of his patients who eat plant-based diets, especially if they've complained about fatigue or restless legs.

Munro says endurance athletes, another health-conscious group, should also check their iron levels. "Sweat is actually a way people lose iron," he explains, citing studies of distance athletes who became iron deficient during training. One study, for example, found that more than 30 percent of the female runners surveyed prior to and at the 2015 London marathon reported a history of anemia.

Frequent blood donors are another group at increased risk for iron deficiency, with up to 35 percent of repeat donors becoming iron depleted.

Still, the largest group of Americans at risk for iron deficiency — besides those who menstruate — are people taking acid-blocking medications for heartburn, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), or indigestion. These drugs reduce the body's ability to absorb iron, explains Ashe.

The largest group of Americans at risk for iron deficiency — besides those who menstruate — are people taking acid-blocking medications for heartburn, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), or indigestion.



ADDRESSING THE SOURCE

Correcting low iron levels is typically a two-step process. If your iron stores are low, it's important to include more iron-rich foods in your diet and start some form of iron supplementation. You'll also need to work with a practitioner to locate and treat the cause of your low iron.

This may mean addressing heavy menstrual bleeding or discontinuing acid-blocking drugs. In rare cases, low iron levels can be a sign of cancer, so your doctor will also want to rule out blood cancer and the presence of tumors.

Supplements are usually good at restoring iron levels, but they can cause an upset stomach or constipation — though Munro notes that there are simple ways to mitigate these effects.

One is to take oral supplements every other day. "With alternate days you absorb at least as much, and maybe more, iron,

and you reduce side effects," says Munro. Ashe also recommends alternate-day dosing for her patients.

Plotnikoff counsels his patients who take iron supplements to be mindful of food combinations. Some foods and supplements — coffee, milk, eggs, soy, tea, and turmeric and calcium supplements, for example — can interfere with iron absorption. He recommends taking supplemental iron at least two hours after any other supplements, food, or drink. "It's really best to absorb iron on an empty stomach," he says.

If iron loss has progressed to severe anemia, your healthcare provider may recommend intravenous iron. IV supplementation tends to raise iron levels faster than oral supplements, which can take longer to offset symptoms of deficiency.

In general, red meat, poultry, and fish are all excellent sources of heme iron, the type our bodies absorb most easily.

CONSUMING DIETARY IRON

If you're running low on iron, your provider will likely suggest including more iron-rich foods in your diet. Among animal sources, oysters win the prize for best source, with about 8 milligrams (mg) of iron in 3 ounces of oysters. The same amount of steak provides roughly 2 mg of iron.

In general, red meat, poultry, and fish are all excellent sources of heme iron, the type our bodies absorb most easily. We take in up to 35 percent of heme iron, compared with the 2 to 20 percent of nonheme iron we get from plant sources. (There is some nonheme iron in meat as well.)

To further complicate matters for vegetarians, other dietary factors may inhibit nonheme iron absorption. These include the phytic acid found in whole grains and the salutary polyphenols found in tea, coffee, and red wine.

Still, while vegetarians and vegans need to make an extra effort, there are plenty of good plant-based sources of iron. Pumpkin seeds, lentils, blackstrap molasses, quinoa, and beans are all iron rich, as are spinach and dried apricots. One of the best plant-based sources of iron is a cup of white beans, which provides about 8 mg of iron — comparable to oysters. Many of these foods are excellent sources of fiber and other phytonutrients as well.

Pairing iron-rich foods with good sources of vitamin C also helps with iron absorption, especially for nonheme sources. This is why doctors have historically recommended iron supplements be paired with orange juice, though that can cause a roller coaster ride for glucose levels.

Plotnikoff suggests patients looking to increase their iron stores try to consume plenty of vitamin C-rich produce, including broccoli, tomatoes, and peppers. Cooking in a cast-iron pan may add bioavailable iron to food too.



TESTING YOUR METTLE

So, should you have your iron tested? If you don't menstruate and do eat meat and seafood, you probably get enough iron from your diet. Guidelines from the National Institutes of Health suggest that a good intake for nonmenstruating adults is 8 mg of iron per day. Anyone who menstruates needs to double that amount, to about 18 mg per day. That number climbs to 27 mg per day during pregnancy.

Meanwhile, if you're tired, have restless legs, or feel generally run-down, a low-cost iron, TIBC, or ferritin test can help you learn whether low iron levels are at the root of your malaise. If they are, correcting for iron deficiency with food and supplements is a simple enough way to recover your energy. And who doesn't love a problem that's easy to solve? 🍷

STEPHANIE SOUCHERAY is a health journalist in St. Paul, Minn.

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Spicy Sausage Pumpkin Pasta

BY KAELYN RILEY

Makes six servings
Prep time: 10 minutes
Cook time: 35 minutes



1 lb. hot (or mild) Italian sausage



$\frac{3}{4}$ cup thinly sliced shallots



6 cups water, divided



1 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. sea salt, divided



1 15-oz. can pumpkin



3 tbs. chopped fresh sage



1 lb. orecchiette or other short pasta



2 cups chopped spinach



$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ground nutmeg



3 oz. grated Parmesan, plus more to garnish



PICK YOUR PUMPKIN

Canned pumpkin is packed with a variety of health-supporting vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, and it also adds a silky richness to this pasta sauce. Be sure to choose a brand that tastes good to you, ideally with few added ingredients.

Place a large, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Cook the sausage, breaking it into small pieces, until browned and cooked through, about eight to 10 minutes. Remove the sausage from the pot with a slotted spoon, leaving the fat behind.

Add the shallots to the pot with a splash of water to deglaze the brown bits. Turn the heat to medium-low, add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of the salt, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the shallots become soft and translucent, about five to seven minutes.

Add the pumpkin, sage, remaining water, and remaining salt to the pot, and stir to incorporate. Raise the heat to bring the mixture to a boil, then lower the heat to maintain an active simmer.

Add the pasta and cover the pot. Allow to cook for 10 to 12 minutes or until the pasta is just short of al dente, removing the lid to stir and scrape the bottom of the pot every few minutes to keep the pasta from sticking.

Add the sausage and spinach and cook for one to two minutes more. Remove the pot from the heat and add the nutmeg, then stir in the Parmesan a bit at a time until incorporated. Add more salt to taste and serve with extra Parmesan for garnish.

KAELYN RILEY is an *Experience Life* senior editor.



Butter Up

There's a whole world of nutty, seedy spreads out there. Find one that's right for you.

BY RACHEL MACPHERSON

NUTS HAVE BEEN transformed into buttery spreads for centuries. Ancient Incans, for instance, consumed peanuts roasted, ground, and mixed with honey, among other preparations. Yet it wasn't until after John Harvey Kellogg of cereal fame experimented with peanut butter in the late 1800s that it earned a spot in most American pantries.

Kellogg's early production involved simply boiling nuts and grinding them to a paste. By the 1950s, however, hydrogenated oils and sugars were staple additions, resulting in the familiar spread that continues to line many grocery store shelves.

Thankfully, we're no longer stuck with just super-sweet peanut butters. A variety of alternatives are now available, each offering a unique taste and a host of nutritional benefits. Including them in your diet may help prevent heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions, as well as some cancers.

"Nut and seed butters contain anti-inflammatory fats, fiber, protein, and vitamins and minerals that many Americans are lacking, like vitamin E, magnesium, phosphorus, iron, and manganese," says nutrition consultant Kellie Blake, RDN, LD, IFNCP. "They also contain phytochemicals that help to lower inflammation in the body."

A SHOPPING GUIDE FOR HEALTHY NUT AND SEED BUTTERS

Not all nut and seed butters are created equal. The most nutritious options won't contain added sugar, inflammatory oils, fillers, or emulsifiers, Blake notes. "It's best to avoid partially hydrogenated and hydrogenated oils, which are associated with imbalanced cholesterol levels, inflammation, and heart-disease risk."

The shorter the ingredient list, the better — ideally, the product should contain only nuts or seeds and salt. Be mindful of how much added sugar you consume, as it can increase metabolic dysfunction and heart-disease risk.

You might also consider salt content, especially if you're tracking your blood pressure for medical reasons.

Don't overlook the environmental impact of your choice, either. Nut production requires a lot of land and water, second only to beef. Almonds, cashews, and pistachios tend to have the highest water footprints; walnuts, pumpkin seeds, and sunflower seeds are less water intensive.

Keep in mind that processed foods use additional water during production, so finding a brand that prioritizes earth-friendly practices can help offset the environmental impact of consuming nuts and seeds.

"Look for fair trade, organic nuts and seeds — and their butters — which help to promote sustainable farming efforts and protect the soil, water supply, and animals," says Blake.



Nuts



Almond Butter: With about 7 grams of protein per a 2-tablespoon serving, almond butter is a good source of magnesium, calcium, and vitamin E (which boosts the immune system and protects against cell damage). Because it's similar in flavor to peanut butter, it's a good starting point for those looking to try something new.



Coconut Butter: Technically a fruit, coconut is the base of this butterlike spread, which boasts up to 2 grams of protein and 4 to 6 grams of fiber per 2 tablespoons. Its medium-chain triglycerides could help boost heart health and cognitive functioning. Its creamy texture and mildly sweet flavor make it great for baking.



Pecan Butter: With 3 grams of protein per serving, pecan butter contains potassium, calcium, and iron. These nutrients contribute to heart health and blood-pressure control, and according to one study, eating pecans can improve cholesterol levels in adults at risk for cardiovascular disease.



Cashew Butter: With 6 grams of protein per serving, cashew butter is rich in copper and magnesium, minerals essential for energy production and bone health. It's also packed with healthy monounsaturated fats. Research has linked cashew consumption to lower cholesterol levels and improved eye health.



Hazelnut Butter: Providing about 4 grams of protein in 2 tablespoons, hazelnut butter is a rich source of biotin, folate, iron, and vitamin E. Recent studies suggest that hazelnuts may enhance the body's antioxidant capabilities and reduce inflammation. Hazelnut butter has a unique, slightly earthy flavor that pairs well with fruit.



Walnut Butter: Offering about 5 grams of protein per serving, walnut butter is known for its alpha-linolenic acid, an omega-3 fatty acid. These fats are essential for brain health and inflammation control. Research has linked them to lower cholesterol and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.

TRY THIS . . .

Any of these nut or seed butters are delicious spread on toast, added to smoothies, or used as a dip for fruit. Or try one of these flavor combinations suggested by Blake.

- Blend a tablespoon of coconut butter into your coffee.
- Try walnut butter as the base of a savory salad dressing.
- Pair hazelnut butter with dark chocolate and bananas, served over oats or yogurt.
- Add cashew butter to a chicken or vegetable curry.
- Use tahini to make your own hummus with our recipe at ELmag.com/lentilhummus.
- Drizzle pecan butter over pancakes or waffles for a small protein boost.

Seeds

Sunflower Seed Butter: Also known as sun butter, sunflower seed butter has about 6 grams of protein per 2 tablespoons. Blake likes sun butter because of its healthy fats, magnesium, selenium, folate, and vitamin E.

Magnesium is a crucial mineral often lacking in American diets, but a couple of tablespoons of sun butter provide an impressive one-third of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) for women and one-quarter of the RDA for men.

Because it doesn't contain tree nuts or peanuts, sun butter is also a great alternative for those with nut allergies. "Tree nuts, peanuts, sesame, and soy are four of the major food allergens," says Blake. "It's important to read food labels carefully to avoid added allergens. For example, soybean oil may be added to seed butter."



Pumpkin Seed Butter: Another nut-free option, pumpkin seed butter boasts around 6 grams of protein per 2 tablespoons and can be a good source of iron and fiber. Pumpkin seeds are notable for their carotenoid, tocopherol, and antioxidant content. They contain zinc, phosphorous, magnesium, and selenium, minerals that can combat arthritis, inflammation, and prostate cancer. Research has also linked pumpkin seeds to lower blood-sugar levels.

Tahini: Made from sesame seeds, tahini provides around 6 grams of protein per serving. It's rich in copper, selenium, and healthy fats. Research has shown that eating tahini can help reduce blood pressure and improve blood-vessel functioning. It's also high in phosphorus and manganese, which are important minerals for bone health.

Savory and slightly bitter, tahini is perhaps best known as an ingredient in hummus, but it's widely used in many Middle Eastern and Mediterranean dishes. 🌱

RACHEL MACPHERSON is a freelance writer and certified nutrition coach based in Nova Scotia.



Go Nuts!

These recipes make nutrient-dense nuts the star of the show.

BY KATE MORGAN

THROUGHOUT HUMAN HISTORY,

people have been eating nuts. In Iraq, archeologists uncovered walnut shells that date all the way back to 50,000 BCE. Early Romans considered nuts food for the gods, and in North America, human remains dating to 6100 BCE have been found alongside piles of pecan shells.

This superfood is as important to the human diet today as it was for our ancient ancestors. Grown worldwide, nuts are incredible sources of protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals. Eating them regularly with a healthy diet can lower the risk of high blood pressure and protect against heart disease and diabetes.

As if that's not reason enough to love nuts, they're also delicious and versatile. In traditional cuisines the world over, they add sweetness or earthiness, a welcome crunch or a buttery texture. In these recipes, nuts — roasted, raw, or even ground into flour — are the stars.





Thai Cashew Beef and Basil Bowls

Makes two to three servings

Prep time: 15 minutes, plus up to
12 hours for marinating

Cook time: 20 minutes

FOR THE MARINADE:

- 1 tbs. muscovado sugar (or brown sugar)
- 1 ½ tbs. fish sauce
- 2 ½ tbs. oyster sauce
- 1 dried Thai chili pepper, minced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 ½ tbs. lime juice

FOR THE BOWLS:

- 10 oz. tri-tip or sirloin, sliced into thin strips
- 18-oz. package wide rice noodles
- 3 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 cup whole or halved unsalted cashews
- 3 green onions, whites minced and greens cut into ½-inch-long pieces
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup roughly chopped fresh basil
- 1 tbs. roughly chopped fresh mint
- Sriracha, to taste (optional)

FOR THE SAUCE:

- ½ tbs. oyster sauce
- 1 tsp. dark soy sauce (or tamari)
- 2 tsp. fish sauce
- ½ tsp. lime juice
- 2 ½ tbs. water

Mix the marinade ingredients in a bowl, add the sliced beef, and toss to coat. Cover and marinate in the refrigerator for at least one hour or overnight.

Cook the noodles according to package directions, drain, and set aside. Whisk the sauce ingredients in a small bowl until combined.

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a wok over medium-low heat and add the cashews. Cook, stirring constantly to avoid burning the nuts, for two to four minutes or until the nuts are golden and slightly crisp. Remove from the wok and wipe out any excess liquid.

Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil and add the white part of the onions. Raise the heat to medium, add the marinated sliced beef, and sauté until it's cooked through and beginning to brown, one to two minutes.

Add the garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the herbs and green part of the onions, and toss until the herbs are just wilted. Stir in the cashews.

Add the noodles to the wok and pour in the sauce, tossing until everything is coated. Serve topped with sriracha, if desired.

Georgian Walnut Dumplings

Makes 12 dumplings

Prep time: 15 minutes, plus

30 minutes to rest the dough

Cook time: 20 minutes

FOR THE WRAPPERS:

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup water, plus more as needed

FOR THE FILLING:

- 1 cup chopped walnuts
- ½ large eggplant, chopped
- ½ onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- ½ tsp. sea salt
- ½ tsp. ground coriander
- ½ tbs. ground cumin
- 1 tbs. paprika
- ½ tbs. lemon juice
- 3 tbs. melted butter, divided
- 2 tbs. minced parsley, divided

To make the dumpling wrapper dough, add the flour to a medium bowl and use your hands to work in the water. If the mixture is still dry or shaggy, add more water a teaspoon at a time until a smooth dough forms. Cover and set aside to rest for at least 30 minutes. (Gluten-free eaters can substitute store-bought gluten-free dumpling wrappers.)

To make the filling, add the ingredients to a food processor and pulse until well-mixed but still coarse.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.

On a floured surface, roll out the dough as thinly as possible. Use a round cutter or the rim of a glass to cut circles approximately 3 inches in diameter. In the center of each, place about a tablespoon of filling. Pinch the sides together to form a pouch shape, and gently twist to seal.

Boil a few dumplings at a time, being careful not to crowd the pot. Once they float to the surface, cook for two to three more minutes, then use a spider or slotted spoon to remove the dumplings from the water. Serve with a drizzle of melted butter and a sprinkle of parsley.



ENJOY MORE!

Find recipes for Low Country Pecan-Crusted Red Snapper With Collard Greens and Grecian Hazelnut-Orange Olive Oil Cake at [ELmag.com/nutrecipes](https://www.ELmag.com/nutrecipes).





Senegalese Maafe (Peanut Stew)

Makes four servings

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour 15 minutes

- 3 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 tsp. sea salt, divided
- 1 cup chopped carrots
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 1 orange bell pepper, diced
- 1 jalapeño pepper, minced
- 1 onion, minced
- 1 medium sweet potato, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbs. paprika
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 8 oz. tomato sauce
- 1 cup natural creamy peanut butter
- 32 oz. chicken broth
- 2 cups cooked white rice, for serving

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil over medium heat. Pat the chicken thighs dry with a paper towel and season with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of the salt. Add the chicken thighs to the pot and cook until browned, about five minutes per side, then remove and set aside.

Add the remaining tablespoon of oil to the pot, then add the carrots, peppers, onion, and sweet potato and sauté until softened, about five to seven minutes. Add the garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the paprika, ginger, and remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt, and stir to coat the vegetables.

Add the tomato sauce and peanut butter and stir until well combined. Add the chicken back to the pot and pour in the broth. Bring to a simmer, then reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and cook for 45 minutes, until the vegetables are tender and the stew has thickened.

Serve over rice. 🌱

KATE MORGAN is a Pennsylvania-based writer and recipe developer.



100

WAYS
to
MOVE
MORE
as a
FAMILY



Fitness doesn't have to be a solo endeavor. Integrate more movement into the life you share with others with these ideas.

BY NICOLE RADZISZEWSKI

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL October day and yet the kids were edging toward the Xbox. Gathered in our family room were my 9- and 12-year-old sons, two of their friends, and my 4-year-old daughter trying to insert herself in the middle. *Could I somehow move this party outside?* I wondered. I really wanted to go for a walk but taking this crew along seemed (a) overly ambitious and (b) possibly disastrous.

Still, I spat out the words before I could overthink the outcome. "Everyone put on your shoes. We're going to the woods." While my kids are used to my spontaneous walks, I had no idea how their friends would react.

Preteens like to be in charge, so I wasn't surprised that each had stipulations. The eldest wanted to bike to the forest while the rest of us drove; the middle ones grabbed a ball and announced that they would be playing soccer on the trail. The littlest added a stuffed unicorn to our crew.

At the river, we ended up under a bridge, playing our own version of soccer that involved kicking the ball at a specific part of the graffiti to score a goal. On our way back, an attempt to rescue the soccer ball from a creek resulted in a lost shoe and a group rescue mission to retrieve it.

We hung from branches, climbed trees, and balanced on logs. We

were happy, muddy, sweaty, and invigorated.

"When you take the thing you were already going to do and add other people, I call this adding 'vitamin community,'" says biomechanist Katy Bowman, founder of Nutritious Movement and author of *Grow Wild*. "Adding community immediately makes a task more nourishing, and suddenly — magically — it is easier to get everyone moving more.

"We can take a walk in the woods alone and meet some of our needs, or we can go with our immediate family and meet even more needs. Or we can go with a more diverse community that is made up of individual needs but focused on a collective goal. It is the latter that produces the richest, most rewarding experience."

When you're with the people you love, sharing in movement is not only physically rewarding but also a powerful relationship builder. Movement connects us and brings us closer together. It cuts across generational lines and sparks joy and camaraderie. It can foster beneficial life skills and values, including teamwork and determination.

Give some of these 100 ideas a try to get moving with your family, friends, community, or whoever else is near and dear to you.



START SMALL

To kick off your multiperson movement dreams, start by **(1) taking a stroll**. Simply going for a walk around the block with a family member can make it easier to connect.

“When you go for a walk, it brings your stress level down, so you can think a little more clearly and begin to move through your feelings,” says therapist Jennifer Udler, LCSW-C, author of *Walk and Talk Therapy: A Clinician’s Guide to Incorporating Movement and Nature Into Your Practice*.

“What’s unique about walking with someone else is that you’re seeing more of that person — their body language, their pace, their energy. There’s a bit of vulnerability in that, but that’s also how we learn to trust, grow, and build relationships.”

If your group includes young kids or skeptical movers, start small. “The first best thing you can do is just walk out your front door,” suggests James Edward Mills, founder of the Joy Trip Project and author of *The Adventure Gap: Changing the Face of the Outdoors*. Then consider the relevance of your walk to everyone in your group: “Ask yourself, *What are they going to get out of it?*”

One way to get your group on board is to **(2) choose a destination** that you can agree on — this can be as simple as walking with your kids to the ice cream shop.

Explore other ways to get to your destination. You can **(3) go for a bike ride**, or maybe the variety of ages and abilities in your group means everyone goes their own way: a combination of

(4) scootering, stroller pushing, dog walking, wagon pulling, wheel-chair rolling — whatever works!



Life Time personal trainer Anna Taylor and her husband **(5) run intervals**, pausing for catch-up breaks at stop signs while their three young children ride their bikes.

Expand your surroundings and **(6) go for a nature walk** in your local forest, arboretum, or preserve. “Being outside in nature offers a direct connection with the natural world and the balanced rhythms of life on our planet,” says Mills. “When we have the ability to share and express our love of nature and love of the people around us, it has an exponentially compounding effect.”

Instead of focusing on the destination or reward at the end, mix things up, slow it down, and appreciate the journey. **(7) Do a scavenger hunt** in which everyone collects items or takes pictures of the things on the list. **(8) Get a book of birds** and see how many you can spot, or **(9) make a journal** of plants you see and use an app to identify them.

To keep it relevant for your sporty kid, **(10) bring a ball** and try kicking it along the trail. Or head off trail and **(11) play the floor is lava**, trying to make your way around an area without touch-

ing the ground. Or **(12) make up your own obstacle course** incorporating your surroundings — trees are great for climbing, hanging, and balancing.

You can all work as a team and collect branches to **(13) build a fort**. Kids’ imaginations run wild in natural settings, so you might find yourself playing a role in their make-believe schemes, whether it’s **(14) seeking out unicorns** or **(15) escaping from pirates!**



“One important thing, perhaps more than anything else, is to make all your experiences manageable.”

"When we have the ability to share and express our love of nature and love of the people around us, it has an exponentially compounding effect."

If your group includes some explorers, they might enjoy **(16) geocaching**, using GPS tracking units to locate containers or caches at specific coordinates on a map. Your teenager and a grandparent may be equally enthusiastic about **(17) searching for treasures** with a metal detector.

Be sure to bring water and snacks, wear the right clothing for your activity, and don't forget the sunscreen and bug spray. Plus, be wary of poison ivy and remember to check for ticks.

"One important thing, perhaps more than anything else, is to make all your experiences manageable," says Mills. "The minute it becomes complicated, it becomes burdensome and less pleasurable."



MAKE THE ADVENTURE BIGGER

"Once you get in the habit of recreationally spending time outdoors, you might try to expand the things you do," Mills advises. Be careful to set realistic expectations and make sure everyone in your group is on board.

To make your experience more physically challenging, try **(18) hiking or trail running** or **(19) rucking**, which is basically just walking while wearing a weighted backpack (or your 2-year-old). Pause for a break alongside the trail and **(20) do a body-weight workout** together.

Pursuing a skill-based activity such as **(21) mountain biking** or **(22) horseback riding** can be a gratifying experience for a group of people who share similar fitness levels and coordination abilities. Or try a paddle sport — which can include **(23) canoeing**, **(24) kayaking**, or **(25) stand-up paddleboarding**.

(26) Do a high-ropes course — it's a fun challenge to take on as a family and doesn't require any skill or experience.

Make it an overnight adventure and **(27) go camping**. You'll move your body a ton between setting up camp, collecting firewood, carrying water, and preparing meals together. Plus, most campsites are close to hiking trails and other venues for outdoor activities.

For your next family vacation, **(28) agree on a locale** where you can enjoy multiple active pursuits and build your itinerary around movement. Depending on where you go and what type of weather you encounter, activities might include **(29) swimming**, **(30) snorkeling**, **(31) surfing**, **(32) sledding**, **(33) downhill skiing**, **(34) snowboarding**, **(35) cross-country skiing**, or **(36) snowshoeing**.



MAKE YOUR HOME MOVEMENT-FRIENDLY

Modifying your home environment is one of the simplest ways to make movement more accessible, says Bowman. Start by **(37) prioritizing open space** to dance, tumble, or play safely. Even if your home doesn't feature a big floorplan, you can **(38) minimize your furniture** to reduce time spent sitting in chairs.

Bowman also notes, "Check in with your **(39) spoken and unspoken rules about movement** and adjust as necessary. How often do you tell your kids to sit down? To stop running or jumping? Sometimes these rules need to be in place, but other times they don't."

Being open to playfulness and spontaneity sends your kids the message that movement and exercise are things we can do anywhere, anytime. "I think the important thing is we don't associate fitness only with the gym," says Jacob Rivera, CSCS, USAW, performance manager with Children's Health Andrews Institute Sports Performance powered by EXOS. "Associating fitness with [all the] ways we can move is really key."



The next time everyone is acting stir crazy, clear some space and **(40) initiate a pillow fight**. Or **(41) set up an obstacle course** that spans your home and ask the kids to help design the obstacles. You can crawl under chairs, jump over cushions, and tightrope-walk on floorboards.

Accessorize your home with hanging elements so everyone can work on grip and upper-body strength.



"There are lots of kits that allow you to **(42) add rings or a hanging bar** on strong beams," says Bowman.

"Now we have a few rock-climbing holds on one beam and a chin-up bar in the doorway. It's an inexpensive way to add grip-, arm-, and shoulder-strength time throughout the day."

(43) Give your kids "rides." A few you can try are wheelbarrows (hold their feet while they walk on their hands), mechanical bull (they try to hold on while you wriggle around on all fours), and piggyback rides. Or incorporate your littles into your workout: **(44) Play the over/under game**, during which you assume plank, downward-facing dog, or another position and your kids (and possibly pets) climb over or under you.

You can **(45) squat with your toddler** (get creative: do a body-weight squat when your kiddo does, or squat while holding them), or **(46) do pushups alongside your teenager**. When working out with kids, keep it lighthearted and lower your expectations. Rather than counting reps and sets, just get everyone moving.

Put on some upbeat music and **(47) have an after-dinner dance party**. You can watch a YouTube or TikTok video and learn how to do a **(48) dance together**. Some gaming consoles have multiplayer dance or sports games, so you can **(49) swap sedentary screen time** for Just Dance or EA Sports.

Play an active old-school game like **(50) Twister** and get tangled up together. Grab a pair of dice and play a **(51) workout game**: Label the sides of one die with exercises; on the other die, indicate the number of reps.

(52) Ground your everyday activities. Move your kitchen table, spread out a blanket, and have a picnic in the kitchen. If you play games as a family in the evenings, move them to the floor. "This is an easy way for everyone to stretch any desk-chair or work-chair tension from their body while also getting that family connection," says Bowman.

Being open to playfulness and spontaneity sends your kids the message that movement and exercise are things we can do anywhere, anytime.

"Sometimes the kids will call us over to the playground and we all play — it's that organic way of connecting and playing rather than being forceful or having too much structure."



GET MOVING IN THE BACKYARD OR AT YOUR LOCAL PARK

Your nearby green space offers a convenient way for your crew to sneak in casual, impromptu movement. It doesn't take a lot of planning to go outside and throw a ball around, but it can mean a lot to a kid — and is a great way for grown-ups to add more movement to their days.

(53) Practice throwing and catching a baseball or football, or play monkey in the middle. **(54) Kick a soccer ball** back and forth or **(55) set up mini goals** and have a scrimmage. **(56) Toss a Frisbee** and let your dog in on the fun.

Set up a net to **(57) play badminton** or **(58) volleyball**, or try **(59) Spikeball** (a cross between volleyball and four square). **(60) Shoot hoops** or **(61) play a game of H-O-R-S-E** in the

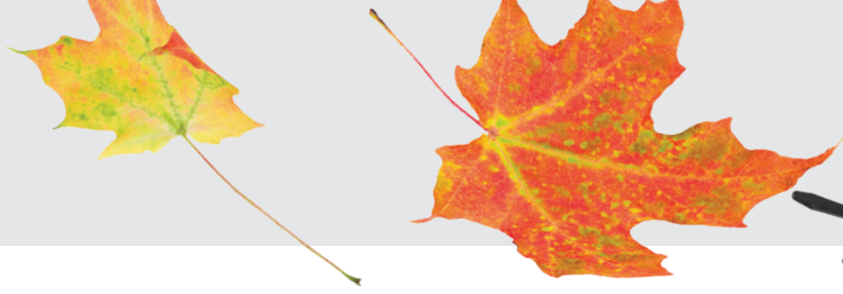
driveway. **(62) Jump on the trampoline** together.

Get creative and set up a **(63) backyard obstacle course** or **(64) doggy agility course** using props such as two-by-fours, hula hoops, tires, and whatever else you find. Go old school with **(65) hopscotch**, **(66) four square**, or **(67) jump rope**.

(68) Organize your own running races: Start at one corner of your block and set a stopwatch to time each family member's one-block run. Or **(69) host your own family Olympics** with multiple events.

Take your kids to the park and join them while they **(70) climb on the monkey bars** and other playground equipment. "Sometimes the kids will call us over to the playground and we all play — it's that organic way of connecting and playing rather than being forceful or having too much structure," says personal trainer Anna Taylor.





INCLUDE OLDER FAMILY OR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

One of my most poignant final memories of my grandma before she passed away was sitting in her living room with her and other family members and taking turns tossing a ball into a wastebasket. Surrounded by her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, her eyes lit up as she sank her armchair shot from 10 feet away. At 97 years old, the once-talented tennis player was able to give her youngest family members a glimpse of her youth and athleticism.

In our fast-paced world where generations may struggle to find common ground, movement is universal. “When it comes to movement for mixed abilities, remember that there are many ways to move a body,” notes Bowman. **(71) “Gardening, (72) playground time, (73) playful dancing, (74) doing art, or (75) cooking and baking** are a few examples of movements where everyone can go at their own pace and ability.”

Sports and games that accommodate a wide range of ages include **(76) bowling, (77) beanbags/cornhole, (78) mini golf, (79) disc golf, and (80) pickleball**, which has exploded over the past few years. “Pickleball is a great equalizer — a 10-year-old can play with an 80-year-old,” says Rivera.

Everyone wins when mixed generations move together. “Youth can learn new physical skills from older members, while the older generation can stay updated with new trends and technologies through the younger ones,” says Sabrena Jo, PhD, director of science and research at the American Council on Exercise. “Intergenerational activities help to break down stereotypes about age, promoting understanding and respect across generations.”



Everyone wins when mixed generations move together.



DO A TASK TOGETHER

Movement doesn't have to be an extra item on your to-do list. It can be layered into your daily routine, says Bowman. “‘Stacking’ is looking for a single task that meets multiple needs. It's different than multitasking, which is trying to juggle more than one task in a single bout of time,” she explains.

For example, instead of everyone sitting down to study alone at their desks, “swap in **(81) a family walk** in the evening, where you practice spelling words, math facts, or play lines while also moving together. You're getting outside time, family time, education, and movement all in that single task,” Bowman says.

Consider the activities your family already does together and see whether you can layer more movement into them. Or take an active task and make it a family affair: **(82) Divvy up the chores** of gathering kindling and chopping and carrying wood to make a fire. **(83) Rake leaves together.** Tackle the job of **(84) weeding the garden. (85) Build a treehouse** or backyard play structure. **(86) Cultivate an indoor garden** by growing herbs, flowers, and vegetables from seed. **(87) Wash the car** by hand.

Or use your collective skills to help others: **(88) Shovel** an older neighbor's sidewalk. **(89) Help your local forest preserve** with invasive-species removal. Sign up to help with an **(90) active service project**, such as cooking and serving people dinner.



"To sweat together and work out and be together, you start to develop a deeper bond similar to being on a team."



TAKE A FITNESS CLASS

Taking a class and learning something new with a loved one can be a great way to bond; it can also reduce the fear of jumping into unknown territory. **(91) Challenge a fitness-loving workout partner** to join you for an advanced exercise class, like Life Time's Alpha or Ultra Fit.

On the other end of the spectrum, seek out yoga studios that offer **(92) parent-child yoga classes**, and **(93) martial arts classes for mixed-age groups**. **(94) Tai chi** is gentle enough to do with older family members, and **(95) Zumba** might be fun to try with your friend who loves to dance.

(96) Schedule semiprivate tennis or golf lessons with a partner or close friend — it can be a fun way to improve your game and spend time together. Or **(97) try small-group or partner personal training** if you have similar fitness goals.

Going to the health club together, even if you do separate programs or classes, is a great way to model healthy habits. "You're creating a sense of family engagement in a healthy lifestyle," says Taylor.



TRAIN FOR A COMMON GOAL

When we belong to a team, we connect through the shared experience of working toward a goal, overcoming adversity, and supporting one another. For families, this bond can be especially meaningful.

"To sweat together and work out and be together, you start to develop a deeper bond similar to being on a team," Rivera explains. "It's great if you can do this with family."

(98) Doing a 5K run or walk is a reasonable goal for people at a range of fitness levels, and a charity event makes it even more meaningful. Up the challenge by **(99) tackling a trail run** together. Our family **(100) completed a mud run** together, which was fun and got us outside to train in the muddiest weather.

Incorporating these types of activities into family life nurtures relationships, emotional well-being, and a sense of achievement, says Jo. "And then, of course, when the goal is achieved, celebrating together is even more satisfying than when done alone." 🏆

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





The Terrain Theory OF CANCER

Insights for cultivating an internal
ecosystem where cancer cannot thrive.

BY LAINE BERGESON

YEARS AGO, as a novice gardener, I found the weeds in my yard confounding. Not only did they spring up overnight, but they spread like wildfire. No sooner would I clear a space for dahlias than the dirt would fill in with dandelions.

Eventually I noticed that weeds showed up and spread every spring no matter what, but their distribution was erratic. They preferred certain spots in my yard over others. It was the same with plants I planted: They would thrive or languish depending on where I put them.

Today, as a more experienced gardener, I get it. Of course my plants flourished in spots with better soil and more sun. It wasn't magic making the dahlias produce blooms the size of dinner plates in my sunny backyard, nor was it a curse causing them to wither anemically in the shady front. It was the growing conditions that made the difference.

The same principle applies inside of our bodies. The health of our cells and tissues depends on the health of their surrounding cells and tissues — and, like gardeners who add nutrients to the soil and water the plants, our food and lifestyle choices can make or break the whole system.

A healthy ecosystem, unsurprisingly, can make the body resistant to diseases of all kinds, including cancer.

This is what's known in integrative medicine as the "terrain theory" of cancer. When we think of the body as a garden we tend with our food and lifestyle choices, we can think of cancer cells as weeds — uninvited guests trying to take over.

We can also use what we know about cancer's preferred environment to make our bodies less hospitable to its growth and spread.

Conventional cancer treatment typically

focuses on targeting and eliminating cancer cells from the body — and this is critical. But it's not all we can do, experts say.

"We know that cancer cells are not an island unto themselves," notes cancer nutrition consultant Jeanne M. Wallace, PhD, CNC, who founded Nutritional Solutions in 1997 to help cancer patients complement their conventional treatments with food, nutrients, herbs, and a healthy lifestyle. "Tending to the internal terrain is the missing link in oncology treatment."

The terrain approach isn't a replacement for conventional care, Wallace adds. It's a holistic plan that centers nutrition and lifestyle, which can make radiation and chemo more effective, minimize their side effects, and offer up a road map for life after treatment. This can be important psychologically as well as physically.

"After a conventional oncologist has done what they can to reduce the tumor burden, they may feel that their work is done," says Nalini Chilkov, LAc, OMD, an expert in collaborative integrative cancer care. "But the patient feels like they've been dropped off the edge of a cliff. [They] need ongoing support for their recovery and to rebuild and sustain their health."

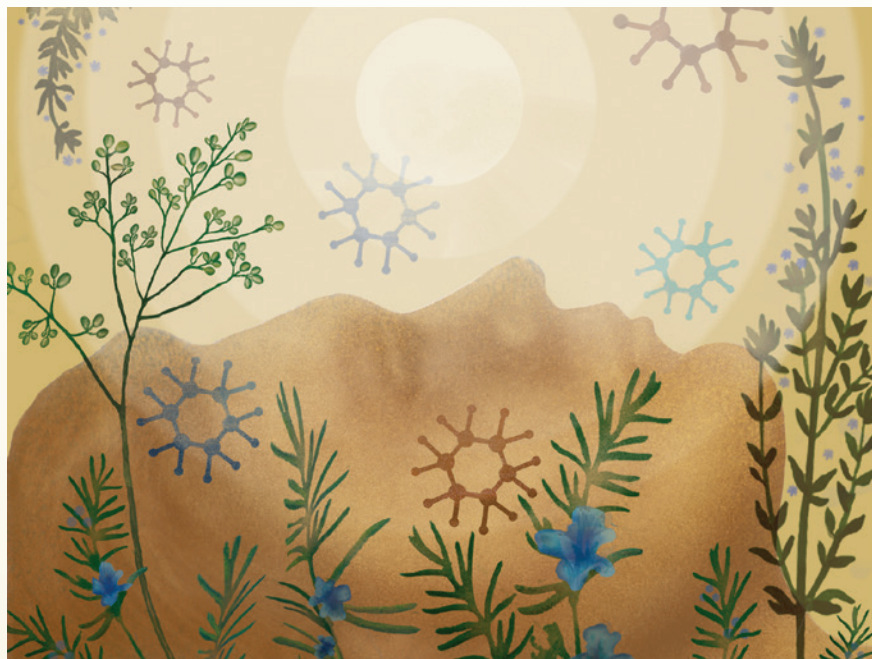
"Every patient deserves to have a plan for their health and not just a plan for their disease."

Current estimates suggest that one in two men and one in three women will receive some type of cancer diagnosis during their lifetime. And a recent World Health Organization report predicts a 77 percent increase in the number of cancer cases worldwide by 2050. So cultivating a healthy inner terrain matters for all of us, with or without cancer.

All the more reason to nurture your internal ecosystem, starting today.

Building Anticancer Terrain:

THE BASICS



YOU DON'T NEED a healthcare provider to begin cultivating an anticancer terrain. While everyone will need unique support during cancer treatment, these diet and lifestyle changes can help you build a healthier terrain right now.

- **Regulate blood sugar** — and not just because cancer likes sugar. Many cancers do like sugar as a source of fuel, but its unhealthy effects are far broader and more damaging.

A high-glycemic diet fans the flames of insulin resistance, says Wallace. “This can foster tumor progression in several ways — it fuels inflammation, it fuels angiogenesis.” (Angiogenesis is the formation of new blood vessels; this normally helps the body heal but also helps tumors grow.)

Wallace adds that insulin resistance may also contribute to dysregulated immune function, impaired mitochondria, imbalanced hormones, and weakened autophagy — a process of cellular cleanup.

To keep blood sugar in check, focus on eating whole foods and complex carbohydrates, and skip ultraprocessed fare and refined carbohydrates. High-quality sleep, physical activity, and stress management all help keep blood sugar regulated too.

If you're struggling to cut back on sugar, you're not alone — it's a highly addictive substance. Try increasing protein and healthy fats to keep your cravings in check. (For more on how to kick the sugar habit, visit [ELmag.com/sugarcravings](https://www.ELmag.com/sugarcravings).)

- **Control inflammation.** The inflammatory response protects the body from acute injury and harmful substances. As a temporary measure, this is beneficial. But when the body is exposed to unremitting challenges from a nutrient-poor diet, environmental toxins, or life stressors, inflammation can become chronic. This can contribute to a host of problems, including tumor growth.

The best way to keep chronic inflammation at bay is to eat plenty of minimally processed whole foods, nourish your gut with plenty of fiber and probiotic-rich fermented foods, and take sleep and stress management seriously. This advice can feel so commonplace as to barely warrant mention, but it's repeated so often because it matters so much. These practices are foundational for building an internal ecosystem that's inhospitable to cancer — and for keeping the body healthy overall. (For more on chronic inflammation, visit [ELmag.com/inflammationfaq](https://www.ELmag.com/inflammationfaq).)

- **Keep NF-kB in mind.** NF-kB is a signaling pathway inside cells that regulates the immune system's inflammatory response. It has been called cancer's “master switch” because it lies upstream of many of the pathways that promote cancer.

“Right now, there's a big push to develop drugs that target cancer-promoting genes, known as ‘oncogenes.’ ‘Oh, here's another gene that promotes cancer. Let's block that,’” says Wallace. “I'm not a huge fan of that approach.”

Gene expression is plastic, she explains, and cancer genes are all part of a massive, interrelated web. “You hit one, and another pops up in its place — like a game of whack-a-mole.”

The more effective approach, she says, is to look upstream. For a great many of the genes involved in cancer growth, the controlling signal pathway is NF-kB. Keeping NF-kB dormant can help dial down the procancer signals in your body.

“NF-kB senses the environment, and it communicates what's happening to the cells, which are always trying to assess the broader ecosystem,” says Wallace. “When NF-kB senses stress, infections, or other problems, it triggers a state of alarm in the cell nucleus.”

One way to calm NF-kB is with some ordinary kitchen spices or herbs, says Wallace — think basil, cinnamon, cardamom, cumin, nutmeg, rosemary, thyme, and turmeric. Use them liberally. Opting for pasture-raised, pasture-finished meat can also help regulate NF-kB, she adds.

Wallace also suggests limiting exposure to tech-related electromagnetic fields (EMFs), because they may interfere with native electromagnetic signaling. “We know that too much non-native EMF triggers NF-kB.”

To help minimize EMF exposure, carry your cellphone in your bag rather than your pocket, leave it in the kitchen when you go to bed, and consider unplugging your Wi-Fi at night. (For more on EMFs and your health, visit ELmag.com/emfs.)

• **Care for your mitochondria.** The tiny factories in our cells that turn the food we eat and the oxygen we breathe into energy, mitochondria play a big role in maintaining cell health and, by extension, the entire internal ecosystem. “They control the fate of the cell, deciding if the cell will undergo apoptosis [programmed cell death] or if the cell has enough energy to heal,” explains Wallace.

Mitochondria read the environment in a way that’s similar to NF-kB, she adds. “They have sensors for sunlight. They pick up on electromagnetic fields. They sense the bonds between protons and electrons in the food that you eat in order to understand the season.”

One easy way to support mitochondria is to live in harmony with nature — especially circadian and seasonal cycles. “Get some exposure to red light from the sun, red-light devices, or incandescent full-spectrum light bulbs first thing in the morning, and don’t expose yourself to blue light from screens late in the day,” says

Wallace. “Eat food in season and get some physical activity. If you’re doing these kinds of things, it leads mitochondria to signal that the fate of the cell is to be healthy.”

(For more on mitochondria and your health, visit ELmag.com/mitochondria.)

• **Steer clear of toxins.** Many environmental toxins are known carcinogens, so anything you can do to reduce your exposure can benefit your internal terrain. “Do you use a lot of cleaning supplies with toxins? Are you spraying pesticides on the lawn?” asks Wallace. “There are a lot of good nontoxic options.”

The same applies for cosmetics and body-care products, like lotion, deodorant, and toothpaste. Both NF-kB and mitochondria can be better regulated when harmful substances aren’t constantly in the vicinity, so start swapping in simpler, nontoxic formulations for the products you use every day. (For more on the benefits of nontoxic personal-care products, see ELmag.com/personalcareproducts.)

• **Sleep in complete darkness.** Recent research has found that when levels of the sleep hormone melatonin are at their peak, some cancer cells revert their phenotype to healthy cells. This is a clinical way of saying some cells act as cancer cells only during the day and revert to healthier cells at night. Researchers have dubbed these “part-time” cancer cells.

Melatonin is triggered by darkness, so sleeping in a completely dark environment is critically important for producing healthy levels of the hormone. Light-blocking curtains keep ambient light from coming into the bedroom, and eliminating screens, power cords with illuminated buttons, and electric alarm clocks can also create a sanctuary of darkness.



WHAT ABOUT HIGH-DOSE VITAMIN C FOR CANCER?

Vitamin C infusions are now a fairly popular adjunctive cancer treatment. In very high doses, vitamin C puts oxidative stress on cancer cells, making them more susceptible to conventional treatments like radiation and chemotherapy.

“It can be a really supportive treatment,” says functional-medicine physician Elizabeth Boham, MD, MS, RD. “But talk to your oncologist first.” As with diet, much depends on your particular cancer and internal terrain.

“If your terrain isn’t doing well, vitamin C infusions are a waste of time, energy, and money,” says functional-medicine physician Patrick Hanaway, MD. “The first thing you want to do is focus on the lifestyle aspects that improve internal terrain — nutrition, sleep, physical activity, stress management, and finding meaning and purpose in your life.”

If you do opt to pursue treatment, it matters where you receive it, adds Boham. “A lot of the IV centers where people go to fix their hangover can’t mix that amount of vitamin C.”

Building Anticancer Terrain: THE SPECIFICS



AS YOU TUNE IN to your health, you'll become better at discerning what your body requires — especially if you're undergoing active cancer treatment. "Our terrain is as unique as our fingerprint," says Wallace.

This means your needs will be different from anyone else's. It's why a dietary or supplement strategy that works for one person may be meaningless (or counterproductive) for someone else.

"It's really important to personalize the work on your individual terrain," says functional-medicine physician Elizabeth Boham, MD, MS, RD, herself a breast-cancer survivor. While most cancer patients will need to manage blood sugar, she says, "[some] will also need to focus more on rest and rejuvenation, while [others] may have to focus on their microbiome or another underlying source of inflammation."

Though cancer development typically involves factors like

inflammation and epigenetic changes, the degree to which each affects your situation can vary greatly. For one person, inflammation may be a big player, and yet "sometimes you'll see someone with a really aggressive cancer but no inflammation," says Wallace. Their problem might be with their mitochondria, or something else.

This is where lab testing comes in. Biomarkers can point to where your internal terrain needs extra support. Tests measuring blood sugar and inflammation are available direct to consumers, and a practitioner versed in integrative cancer care can help interpret the numbers — and offer more nuanced tests for personalized feedback. Wallace's team uses a range of tests to identify specific vulnerabilities in a client's terrain to address problems at their source.

Internal terrain isn't static; it changes over time and with new treatments, so ongoing testing is important. "If we have a client and

they are on two specific drugs and a month later the oncologist switches them to two different drugs, [our integrative plan] will be something completely different than it was before the switch," says Wallace.

She recommends bloodwork during treatment and modifies the integrative-care plan accordingly.

Once treatment is complete, getting routine bloodwork can be valuable both physically and psychologically. It allows you to track your internal terrain and make sure your numbers are staying in the desired range — which is a comfort.

Such interventions can help you give your terrain what it needs most this season. And staying attuned to its changing needs gives your garden its best chance to produce award-winning blooms for years to come. 🌱

LAINE BERGESON is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

IF YOU GET A CANCER DIAGNOSIS . . .

When you or someone you love is diagnosed with cancer, you may feel like the world just tilted on its axis. It is normal to feel this way, says integrative cancer-care expert Nalini Chilkov, LAc, OMD — cancer is a serious and scary prospect. Yet no matter how dire the report, you do have time to catch your breath and get your questions answered so that you can make informed decisions.

Integrative cancer experts offer this advice to help you prepare for the journey.

1. Take time to make a plan.

A cancer diagnosis is completely unsettling, and your first impulse may be to act quickly. That's a good instinct — but acting quickly is different from acting immediately.

"When people are first diagnosed, the oncologist often says, 'OK, we'll start chemo next week, then we'll do surgery, then more chemo, then some radiation, then we'll do hormonal therapy,'" says Chilkov. "And the patient's supposed to be ready for all that next week." That's a lot for many of us.

And while some cancers are aggressive, most develop slowly over time; they don't appear in the body overnight. In these cases, treatment doesn't have to start overnight either.

"Cancer is not an emergency — [your] hair isn't on fire," she notes. "There's time to get a second or third opinion, to organize what needs to be organized, to get childcare covered, to be well prepared for the challenging treatments ahead."

Taking a little extra time is also good for your mental health. "People can integrate what has just happened to them and get ready to do something difficult," she adds.

2. Get multiple opinions.

Finding the right care team is important. "A second and third opinion is always helpful," says functional-medicine physician Elizabeth Boham, MD, MS, RD. This can be especially valuable if you live in an area without a reputable cancer-treatment center.

Even if you have good local resources, there's value in getting additional perspectives. Oncology is practiced differently at different hospitals across the United States and in other parts of the world. And the best specialist for your specific diagnosis may be located elsewhere.

"You may not end up getting treatment [at a different cancer center], but they may introduce you to new options or reinforce what your local oncologist is recommending," adds Boham.

And now there's telemedicine. Many cancer experts, including integrative practitioners, are available for virtual consultations, so you need travel no farther than your laptop.

3. Think "both/and."

Integrative cancer care can be powerfully supportive, but even its practitioners don't view it as a replacement for chemotherapy, radiation, or immunotherapy. "Most natural therapies don't actually reduce tumor burden, and that's the first job in any treatment protocol," says Chilkov.

The best way to think about an integrative approach to cancer may be as a complement to tumor-reduction protocols. Cancer nutrition consultant Jeanne Wallace, PhD, CNC, describes her work this way: "It's about how we can assess the terrain and match you up with the self-care strategies that are best for you."



WHAT'S THE BEST ANTI- CANCER DIET?

There's a lot of debate about the "right" diet for cancer. Experts champion different diets: ketogenic, ancestral, paleo. Others say vegan is the only way to go. Or maybe a Mediterranean diet, the fasting-mimicking diet, or intermittent fasting. It can be dizzying to dive into the world of nutritional oncology.

So, what's the best anticancer diet for you? It depends. There is no one right way to eat when you have cancer, says functional-medicine physician Patrick Hanaway, MD. The best approach will be tailored to your diagnosis and internal terrain.

"Some cancers, like glioblastoma multiforme, are particularly insulin sensitive," he says. "So, if we have someone with one of those cancers, then they may benefit greatly from a ketogenic approach," which keeps insulin production low.

Depending on the cancer, this approach can even make treatments more potent, says Hanaway. Other insulin-sensitive cancers include breast, colorectal, pancreatic, and radiation-sensitive cancers, such as head and neck and anorectal.

Then there are the types with no apparent relationship to insulin sensitivity. "We can't make a global statement," he continues. "We can't say all cancers are stimulated by sugar and all cancers should be treated with a ketogenic diet."

If your terrain biomarkers suggest epigenetic changes are in play, "a plant-based diet might work well," says cancer nutrition consultant Jeanne Wallace, PhD, CNC. Conversely, if blood tests indicate you have a problem with angiogenesis, a plant-based diet may not be the right choice for you. It can lower zinc and increase copper, and copper can fuel the angiogenesis that supports tumor growth.

A functional or integrative practitioner with expertise in nutritional oncology can help you understand your cancer biomarkers and develop the best approach.

BECOME A PRO-AGER



OUR ATTITUDE AFFECTS HOW WELL WE AGE. IT'S TIME TO EMBRACE OUR YEARS.

BY JON SPAYDE

AT AGE 70, Joan MacDonald was struggling. She stood 5 feet 3 inches tall and weighed 198 pounds. She suffered from high blood pressure, acid reflux, edema in her ankles, and acute arthritis. Stairs were hard to climb, and she felt tired much of the time.

She knew her lifestyle was contributing to her health issues, but her own efforts to create change never seemed to last.

Joan's daughter Michelle — a strength and conditioning specialist, health coach, yoga practitioner, and chef — had other ideas for her mom. She had seen her clients thrive when they became active, attentive to their diets, and optimistic about their bodies and their lives. So she got her mom started on an exercise regimen, a whole-foods diet, and a regular meditation practice.

Within two years, Joan went from avoiding stairs to doing weighted pull-ups.

Today she's a fitness influencer with nearly 2 million followers whose Train With Joan program offers workouts, recipes, and community building through a range of digital channels. "Exercise and nutrition saved my life," she says. "You can't turn back the clock — but you can wind it up again."



Exercise and nutrition were central to the improvements in Joan's health — but also fundamental to her transformation was a shift in her attitude about aging. To feel better, she first had to discard her assumptions that youth is required for vitality and age equals obsolescence. She became *pro-aging*.

A pro-aging attitude doesn't require Pollyanna-ish positivity.

Despite our fears, research has shown most older adults will maintain relatively good health and cognitive functioning. Yet we're surrounded by antiaging messages, from "antiaging" skincare services to well-meaning compliments like "you look so young for your age!"

In some circles, antiaging's high-tech face is the pursuit of infinite longevity. This includes "biological

reprogramming" techniques that promise to reprogram the body at a cellular level and extend lifespan.

Yet pro-agers don't deny their mortal state; they simply make the most of life and enhance their health in all the ways they still can. They have shown time and again that it's possible to embrace aging for all it offers, even as we miss what it inevitably takes away.

ATTITUDE MATTERS

American culture is obsessed with youth — and it doesn't seem to help us age more gracefully. By contrast, the Japanese, who honor age and celebrate Keiro No Hi ("Respect for the Aged Day") in the third week of September, have one of the longest life expectancies of any nationality. Japan is also the home of more centenarians and supercentenarians (people who live to be 110 and beyond) than any other country.

Becca Levy, PhD, is a professor of social and behavioral sciences at Yale School of Public Health. When she traveled to Japan in graduate school and saw how differently aging is perceived and experienced in that country, she was inspired to focus her entire career on researching, writing about, and advocating for aging. She's now a leading expert on how mindset influences how we age, and she shares many of her findings in *Breaking the Age Code: How Your Beliefs About Aging Determine How Long and Well You Live*.

The book features one decades-long study that surveyed a group of older adults in Oxford, Ohio, about their attitudes toward aging. Levy correlated their responses with data from the National Death Index, a federal effort to assess Americans' longevity.

She was startled to find that the people with the most positive views on aging lived an average of seven and a half years longer than those with the most negative attitudes. "Age beliefs were determining their lifespans, above and beyond the influence of gender, race, socioeconomic status, age, loneliness, and health," she writes.

A positive outlook about aging may even influence motor skills. In one of Levy's studies, a group of older adults exposed to subliminal age-positive messages demonstrated faster walking speed and better balance compared with a group that heard neutral messages.

Even gene expression may be affected by mindset, her research found. One group of study subjects who carried the APOE4 gene (a risk



factor for Alzheimer's) were almost 50 percent less likely to develop the disease if their attitude toward aging was positive.

EMBRACE PRO-AGING

There's no denying that aging changes our bodies. Frank Lipman, MD, a New York-based integrative-medicine practitioner, acknowledges that there is "a generalized decrease in functioning of the organism" as we age.

In other words, our cells exhibit less gusto than they once did: They're less efficient at cleaning up cellular waste. Sex-hormone production diminishes. Bones become more fragile and we lose some synaptic connections in our brains.

Still, this is no reason to give up on our health — or our lives. Lipman suggests these physical changes are simply good reasons to become more conscious and proactive about maintaining good health as we age. (See "Pro Tips for Healthy Aging" on page 73.)

Not least because even these age-related health effects aren't universal. Nor are they inevitable.



The aging process is influenced by more than just time — including a host of factors within our control. In his book *The New Rules of Aging Well*, Lipman explains a range of ways we can improve our physical health as we age. (Learn more about them at ELmag.com/agingwell.)

Still, as Levy shows, attitude makes a difference — even without dramatic behavioral changes.

"If we only look at average aging, which is what some research does," she notes, "we won't recognize the heterogeneity, the diversity of the aging experience. It's not inevitable that everyone's going to show decline across the board. There are people who maintain high levels and even show improvements in later life."

These strategies can help you become a pro-ager, from the ground up.

Treat your brain like your heart.

No aspect of aging stokes as much anxiety as cognitive decline, from the loss of sharpness to full-blown dementia. While the exact causes of Alzheimer's remain a matter of

“We don’t want anything about our mind or brain to become rigid. We want to keep challenging them, keep exposing ourselves to new things, keep trying to do things in slightly different ways than before.”

debate, there’s a lot we can do to maintain brain health — especially if we remember that the brain is a physical organ, intimately connected to the rest of the body.

“Sometimes people underestimate how much physical health directly impacts brain health,” says neuro-psychologist Vonetta Dotson, PhD, a professor of gerontology and psychology at Georgia State University and author of *Keep Your Wits About You: The Science of Brain Maintenance as You Age*.

“The example I always give is vascular health,” she says. “As we get older, our risk for things like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and heart attack gets higher. Well, all that has to do with blood flow not being adequate. If your heart’s having problems, that means your brain is having problems too; your brain is not getting adequate blood flow.”

This is why one of Dotson’s mantras is “heart health equals brain health.” She believes that heart-healthy measures, such as regular exercise, a plant-rich diet, smoking

cessation, moderate alcohol consumption, and good stress management, all contribute to a healthy brain.

Keep learning. Integrative psychiatrist Henry Emmons, MD, coauthor of *Staying Sharp*, differentiates between the mind and the brain. He believes that as we age, the mind can help protect the organ.

“The brain is very much a physical, anatomical, chemical structure,” he explains. “The mind utilizes the brain, but it’s more than that. It includes elements of consciousness, awareness, our sense of self, our ability to connect with others. It’s not only the physical structure we want to strengthen, but also this capacity for conscious awareness.”

Emmons acknowledges that brain function changes as we age, but this doesn’t have to amount to a loss of sharpness.

“The 20-year-old brain is like a young forest,” he says. “There are lots and lots of trees, but they’re not mature. And as we age, the forest may be smaller, but the trees are bigger. They’re branching farther. The neurons that are there, if they’re well cared for, can function very well.”

The point, Emmons adds, is to nurture the growth of those trees. “It’s to our advantage to continually work at forcing more branching and connecting of these neurons.”

How do we do it? Just as we always have: by learning new things — ideally, he argues, in the spirit of fun and community. “Those are the things that seem to promote this ongoing process of brain connectivity,” Emmons says. “They can even aid in creating new brain cells.”

Research has shown that strengthening the mind through mindfulness practices also helps maintain mental acuity. In a study published in 2021, a group of subjects aged 65 to 80 who received mindfulness training did better on a test that evaluated memory, executive functioning, and overall cognition than a control group.

Functional MRI scans of the mindfulness group also showed

increased neural activity in the default network of their brains, particularly between the hippocampus — a part of the brain integral to memory — and the posteromedial cortex, which is involved in self-processing and self-awareness.

Stay curious. Emmons believes staying interested in life is a key to healthy aging — and this means being open to new things.

“It’s important not to be too fixed in our beliefs or our routines,” he says. “It’s good to have a little bit of routine, but we don’t want it to become rigid. In fact, we don’t want anything about our mind or brain to become rigid. We want to keep challenging them, keep exposing ourselves to new things, keep trying to do things in slightly different ways than before.”

Curiosity helps promote new brain-cell growth and new neural connections, he adds. And we can intentionally cultivate it. It may take some effort, but that’s helpful too.

“Genuine curiosity might actually make us a little uncomfortable,” Emmons adds. “It’s a healthy form of mild stress; something that we’re curious about puts us out of our comfort zone a bit. That’s very, very good for the brain.”

Research supports this. A 2018 Dutch neuroimaging study showed that curiosity and discovery — especially in situations where the outcome is uncertain — elicit activity in the frontal and parietal brain areas. These zones support attention and self-control.

Adjust your beliefs. The physical effects of aging in our bodies are the “downstream factors,” Levy argues. Our individual and collective beliefs about aging, meanwhile, are the “upstream” determinants. Her research has shown repeatedly how a shift in attitude has real implications for health.

“If we can change the upstream beliefs and social determinants,” she notes, “and create a culture that has more positive age beliefs, then those

ways of thinking are going to trickle down and potentially lead to benefits for individuals of all ages.”

It makes sense: If you believe you’re too old to do something — exercise, learn something new, stay socially engaged — you won’t do it. But if you believe life is still an open book, you’re far more likely to try new things, stay active, and maintain the optimism that sustains you for the effort it takes to stay sharp and strong.

Update your aging vocabulary.

How we talk about aging — to others and ourselves — is an easy thing to change. Faced with a challenge, instead of defaulting to negative self-talk like *I’m too old for that*, we can ask ourselves, *What kind of help and support do I need to make this happen?*

Rather than reflexively saying, *I’m way too old to wear this*, we can ask ourselves, *Do I like this? Does it make me feel amazing? Then I’m wearing it!*

The Pacific Neuroscience Institute has a list of suggestions for adjusting our antiaging talk, including remarks that may be well intentioned:

- Instead of “You look so young,” try “That outfit is fantastic.”
- Instead of “You’re so young at heart,” try “I love your appetite for life.”
- Instead of “Wow, that’s so great you live on your own,” try “How do you like living alone? Do you have all the support you need?”
- Instead of “Should you really be surfing/rock climbing/riding a motorcycle at 65?” just ask “Do you have your wetsuit/harness/helmet?”

Embrace wisdom. The original pro-aging idea holds true: Age can bring wisdom. Multiple experiences of joy and sorrow, frustration and fulfillment, can lead us toward a more thoughtful, nuanced, and serene approach to life.

Of course, that’s not a given. Life can be difficult, and it’s just as easy to rehash old resentments and see the passing years as bringing nothing but weakness, decline, trouble, and loss. But we have a choice about which route to take.



In her book *The Swedish Art of Aging Exuberantly: Life Wisdom From Someone Who Will (Probably) Die Before You*, Margareta Magnusson shares stories of a life on multiple continents, including memories of a world at war. She embodies the flexibility, positivity, joy, and wisdom of a pro-aging attitude.

“When you are over 80, it is easy to be angry,” she writes. “There is new stuff all the time — new politicians, new countries, new wars, new technologies.”

“If you are over 80,” she continues, “you have two choices: Be angry, or go with the flow. Please try the latter. To accept, even enjoy, the changes can be really fun.”

Her most cherished memories involve the times she embraced whatever life brought her. “The older I get, the more I find that I remember clearly all the things I said yes to, just when I was about to say no. I must admit I have not been open-minded all the time. I just wish I had been.”

A pro-aging attitude, pro-aging beliefs, and proactive self-care make



We can embrace
our wisdom
rather than our
resentment — and
if we choose, we
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it easier to say yes to all that our lives still have to offer. We can embrace our wisdom rather than our resentment — and if we choose, we can pass it on to our loved ones who are (for now) still enjoying their youth. ☺

JON SPAYDE is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

PRO TIPS FOR HEALTHY AGING

The body does change over time. These suggestions from integrative physician Frank Lipman, MD, can help you adjust your behaviors with the goal of maintaining your best possible health.

KEEP MOVING.

Regular movement may be the most important thing you can do physically as you age. You don't have to become a marathon runner, says Lipman: "Just get up and move around. Getting out of your chair, walking up the stairs, just doing basic day-to-day things — it's all extremely important."

On top of that baseline, Lipman also recommends strength training. "As we get older, we lose muscle mass; we get weaker," he notes. "We need to work harder."

Studies from the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University have suggested that the best way to improve physical function and avoid disability as we age is a combination of walking and resistance training.



EAT WELL — AND A LITTLE LESS.

A diet rich in whole foods, with plenty of vegetables, fruits, and healthy fats, is important at any age. It's also vital to get ample protein as we grow older: It helps counteract the loss of muscle mass.

Lipman also recommends eating less overall as our caloric needs and digestive power decline in later life. "Eating less is one of the factors that have been studied the most in the promotion of longevity," he says. "The more food, the more work you need to do to break it down properly, and our digestive mechanisms are less efficient as we age. Less food is less strain on the system."

He suggests frequent 16-hour overnight fasts to let the digestive system rest. This can be as simple as eating an early dinner and waiting to eat again until lunch the next day.

He also recommends cutting back on refined sugar to reduce inflammation as well as the risk of insulin resistance, which can lead to type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular problems. This may also reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease, which some research has linked to insulin resistance.

IMPROVE YOUR SLEEP.

The National Institute on Aging states that older adults need just as much sleep as anyone else — seven to nine hours a night — but it's often harder to get.

As it ages, the body's production of many hormones decreases, and one of those is the sleep-supportive hormone melatonin. "If you're sitting in front of a screen or in bright lights, your body is not going to secrete any melatonin at all, and it's hard for your body to adjust to a quick transition between bright light and darkness," Lipman explains. "So, a gradual transition from light to dark can be helpful — it will help your body start secreting the melatonin it needs."

This can be as simple as avoiding screens and lowering the lights in the last hour before bed, which gives your body a chance to wind down.

Other ways to support good sleep include maintaining a routine bedtime, avoiding long naps, keeping your bedroom cool, and avoiding caffeine and large meals late in the day. (For more sleep-supportive strategies, visit ELmag.com/insomnia.)

STAY HYDRATED.

Hydration becomes more of an issue as we grow older. "It's not necessarily because we need more water," says Lipman, "but because our capacity to sense that we are dehydrated decreases. We don't get as thirsty."

Hydration is critical for the human body. It keeps tissues flexible and healthy and reduces inflammation by flushing toxins.

Hydration is also key for protecting the joints, because water accounts for about 80 percent of their cartilage. (Find more ways to support joint health at ELmag.com/feedyourjoints.)

Try these useful tricks for maintaining hydration:

- Drink a glass of water first thing in the morning.
- Invest in an attractive water bottle that you enjoy using.
- Keep a hydration log.
- Set "drink water" reminders on your digital devices.
- Drink a glass of water before any meal.
- Check the color of your urine. Clear or light colored signals good hydration.



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"HEADLINE ANXIETY" MAY NOT BE A DIAGNOSABLE disorder, but the stress, frustration, and even sense of hopelessness you might experience from hearing the news on any given day can be a real issue. Learn to soothe your news-induced emotional responses with our calming tips on page 76.





When the News Is Too Much

Start soothing your headline anxiety with these calming tips.

BY JESSIE SHOLL

YOU PROBABLY KNOW the feeling: You read or listen to breaking news on your TV, radio, phone, or laptop, and you are immediately struck with an anxious, palm-moistening sensation. “Headline anxiety” may not be a diagnosable disorder, but the stress you might experience from hearing the news is tangible.

“Feeling overwhelmed by world news and various events” is a real issue, says clinical psychologist Kiki Fehling, PhD. “It can feel like intense anxiety, agitation, anger, depression, or hopelessness.”

Even if you recognize the problem, it can be challenging to distance yourself from the source of your anxiety. These days, the news is constant and ubiquitous: the scrolling banners on 24-hour channels that create urgency even when the sound is off; the social-media feeds that shoot you the same story over and over again.

The COVID era hasn’t helped matters. A recent study found an associa-

tion between media exposure and emotional distress during 2020. It’s no wonder that regularly hearing about the effects of a deadly virus — as well as the political and social justice turmoil that accompanied the pandemic’s early days — would trigger a stress response in many of us.

“A trigger is any word, person, event, or experience that touches off an immediate emotional reaction,” explains psychotherapist David Richo, PhD. “It’s like being startled by a noise: The noise is the trigger; the startle is the response.”

And because your body has gone into fight-or-flight mode, your reaction can often be more extreme or last longer than the event itself. (For more on dealing with emotional triggers, see [ELmag.com/emotionaltriggers](https://www.ELmag.com/emotionaltriggers).)

Finding yourself lost in the maelstrom of a stressful news cycle can certainly make you feel powerless, but you have more agency than you may think. You can still be an informed

citizen without feeling overwhelmed by headlines or getting triggered each time you catch a glimpse of a news broadcast. Try these protective steps to help safeguard your mental health.

SET BOUNDARIES WITH YOUR TECH

Imagine you’re out for a walk on a sunny afternoon and you suddenly start getting alerts on your phone that stop you in your tracks. Something scary is happening, whether near or far, and now you’re anxious and upset — when you’d gone for a walk in search of serenity.

That’s why Jacqueline Toner, PhD, author of *What to Do When the News Scares You*, recommends turning off all push notifications on your devices. “Anything that sends you a notification is a problem because you lose control of the input,” she explains.

Those Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly known as Twitter) likes are designed to elicit the same response

as a slot machine — little hits of dopamine that come at unexpected times. That's why it's normal to crave them, and why it can be so hard to turn them off. But controlling *when* you engage with social media is worth the effort.

You can also delete apps from your phone and view sites on a computer only at certain times. Or try setting your phone screen to black and white, which makes it less visually appealing.

Can't quit scrolling through the news at bedtime? Keep an alarm clock rather than your phone in the bedroom. (For more tips on breaking your cellphone habit, see ELmag.com/phonefree.)

If you're experiencing regular headline anxiety, Fehling also recommends unsubscribing from news-related email lists, if only temporarily. "Maybe even unplug from tech completely if you have that capability and option," she suggests.

BE MINDFUL OF NEWS SOURCES

A 2020 Pew Research Center study found that eight in 10 U.S. adults get their news from a digital device "often or sometimes," and 53 percent get their news from social media "often or sometimes," with Facebook topping the list.

That's concerning, Toner explains, because of how easy it is to fall into echo chambers on social media, where the same news and opinions are repeated ad nauseam. Be a good social media citizen by avoiding the temptation to spread the news.

"As soon as you hear something, resist the urge to run and share it with somebody else," she advises. When you immediately share, you might add to their stress and make it harder for them to take in news on their own terms.

It's also important to choose your news sources wisely, Toner adds. If, for example, you tune in to a newscast with multiple fast-moving chyrons (those scrolling banners on the bottom third of the screen), "you're going to

feel more stressed than if you read a newspaper or watch public television or listen to public radio, where there's not so much excitement built in."

Also make sure your sources are trustworthy. Misinformation can easily intensify headline stress because it often leads with catastrophe in order to trigger anxiety, anger, or other intense emotions.

That's by design: Misinformation plays on our feelings to circumvent our thinking, often to great effect. Studies have found that negative headlines improve click-through rates. (For more advice on spotting misinformation on social media, see ELmag.com/factorfiction.)



TAKE ACTION

If you find yourself feeling consistently anxious about a particular headline or world event, consider putting that anxiety into action. "The body feels emotions to try to motivate us to do things," says Fehling. "There is something in the world that we don't like and we wish were different; our bodies are telling us that."

Volunteering or contributing resources to others can help us cope with stress and other negative emotions. It gets us out of our own heads and makes us feel good.

"Humans inherently are empathetic beings," Fehling notes. "But the other really effective part of volunteering and contributing is that you're using some of the emotions that

you're feeling from headline stress to take action."

If you're not sure where to begin, start with a piece of paper. In a 2022 TED Talk, Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, PhD, a marine biologist, writer, and climate-policy expert, suggests drawing a Venn diagram to map these questions: *What are your skills? What is the work that needs doing? What brings you joy?*

Where your answers intersect is where you should put your effort. Johnson's talk is about climate change specifically, but her method can apply to any current crisis.

WIDEN THE SCOPE OF YOUR ATTENTION

Meditation, breathwork, yoga, and other mindfulness practices are proven to help reduce stress. You can try those methods and others to soothe headline anxiety and regulate your emotions, Toner says.

"The point is to also be able to focus on the other parts of your life," she explains, "and not be swept up in all the stimuli to stress about." (For more methods for finding calm in a frantic world, see ELmag.com/findcalm.)

Toner encourages people to pay more attention to the rest of the world around them. If you're taking a walk in nature while listening to the news or looking at your phone to see who commented on one of your social media posts, she says, you're not listening to the birds or the stream flowing nearby.

If you're lost in a sea of angry social media comments about the state of the world, you're not noticing the people doing good work to create more humane systems and lasting change.

"It's easy to get hooked by what's frightening," she says. "But then we tend to overlook the quiet, but positive, everyday things." 🌱

JESSIE SHOLL is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

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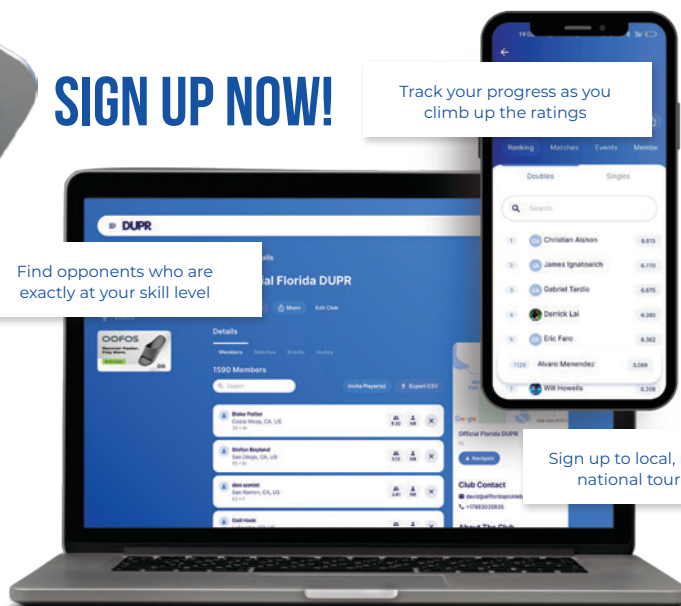


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Loving Well

Five lessons on sustaining deeper connections that support well-being.

BY HENRY EMMONS, MD,
AND AIMEE PRASEK, PhD

DEEP, LOVING connections with others are among life's most gratifying experiences. They also support our mental, emotional, and physical health in ways too numerous to count. Yet deep connections require us to open our hearts — a process that can be difficult and uncomfortable.

Most security-seeking humans find vulnerability at least a little challenging; when we've had our hearts broken, opening them again can feel almost impossible.

In his *Letters to a Young Poet*, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke acknowledged this difficulty — yet he also insisted that learning to love well is the most important thing any of us can do in this lifetime. He described it as “the work for which all other work is but preparation.”

Rilke was right. Deep connections — with ourselves and others — are essential for well-being. In that spirit, we share these five lessons with the intent of helping you learn to love deeply and well.

1. Learn to love yourself.

A story from Islamic tradition describes a man whose garden was overrun with dandelions. He asked neighbors for advice about getting rid of them. He tried everything they suggested, but nothing worked.

He went to the local gardening club, and their advice didn't help either. He finally asked the king's gardener, who thought for a moment, stroked his beard, and said, “There's only one more thing you can do: Learn to love the dandelions.”

This advice is good for more than gardens. Many of us believe we first must weed out all our flaws before we can be lovable. Yet this is an impossible task. We can all use a little improvement, but it's an illusion to think we need to be perfect before we can connect with others. Do your best to love yourself as you are, dandelions and all.

2. Learn to see the innocence in others.

We often watch the world around us through a lens of harsh judgment. It's easy to focus on somebody else's problem and how we think it should be fixed. Such a rigid perspective can cause us to misrecognize what's right in front of us. We make assumptions based on little evidence or understanding.

A simple way to shift the habit of judging is to see the

innocence in others. Give folks the benefit of the doubt. This can help pull us out of the cycles of reactivity and negativity that hold us down and keep us apart.

3. Learn to be permeable.

True, you don't often hear people described as permeable. But this description offers a helpful reminder that we are a part of a larger system. In the natural world, healthy organisms cannot wall themselves off from their surroundings — at least not for long.

We humans are no different. We are in constant interplay with everything around us — a give and take that is essential not only for survival but also for a life of meaning and purpose. We are not designed to be impenetrable fortresses, even if this helps us avoid getting hurt.

We all wall ourselves off from time to time, often unconsciously, but if we consistently put up a wall, we end up hurting ourselves even more. When we're shut down, the good stuff can't come in either.

Being permeable means we soften our defenses a bit, we let emotions in, we let emotions out. Importantly, being permeable allows us to let in the good.

4. Learn to listen deeply.

Deep listening positively affects both those who practice it and those who speak. We

build connections with others as we listen to them.

Poet Marilyn Nelson says that when we listen deeply to one another and ourselves, poetry arises. It's another way of saying deep listening can allow us to make connections between disparate things we may not have considered before. Deep listening helps us get out of our own way.

5. Learn to build a house of belonging.

Almost all of us have a yearning to belong, even as we resist letting down our guard. David Whyte's poem “The House of Belonging” speaks to this; in it he describes the house of belonging as a place “where I want / to love all the things / it has taken me so long / to learn to love.”

Like building a house, building a sense of belonging takes attention and effort. It's a process that involves getting outside of ourselves to connect with others while learning to create a deeper sense of meaning in our lives. Then we can envision a blueprint and take action.

What does a house of belonging look like to you? How are you connecting in ways that nourish you, ways that help build that house? How do you feel when you sense that you belong?

Imagine your house and then take the brave steps to start building.

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



Back-to-School Transitions

The first weeks of school are stressful for parents as well as kids. Experts offer advice on how you can set your family up for success.

BY KATIE DOHMAN

PERHAPS ONE of the biggest surprises of parenthood is just how much anxiety swells up around back-to-school season — not just our kids' worries, but our own.

Transitions bring questions and anticipation, plus the complexity of going from free-for-all summer days to more regimented schedules and a new set of expectations.

"Anxiety is rooted in fears and worries of the unknown, that anticipatory anxiety of not knowing what's to come," says Francyne Zeltser, PsyD, a licensed psychologist and clinical director at the Manhattan Psychology Group. For parents, much of the anxiety stems from worrying about how they're going to manage things, including schedule shifts, extracurricular

sign-ups, meal planning, the financial burden of supplies and clothes, and more — while helping kids cope with their own worries on top of it all.

But it's not a one- or two-person show, Zeltser and other experts note. Just as kids have parents to fall back on when they're anxious, parents can and should call on their communities to help them get through the season.

STRESS SOURCES

Kids' anxiety. *What do I wear? What do I bring? Who will be my teacher? Are any of my friends in my class?* These are just some of the questions on kids' minds as they head into a new school year. The unknowns create a maze of anxiety that kids often struggle to navigate.

Projecting stress. Parents may not realize that the stress they feel often transfers to their kids. Yet what parents worry about likely doesn't align with what keeps their kids up at night, says Joshua Stein, MD, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at Minnesota-based PrairieCare. It's a misunderstanding that can generate tension when kids don't feel heard or understood.

Meeting new expectations. School curriculum only gets harder as kids advance each year. And beleaguered parents (trying to figure out Common Core math, for instance) soon come to realize it.

Fear of missing out. Parents often worry that they haven't signed their kids up for the right activities to set them up for key socialization opportunities or help them burnish their college applications. "Parents fear their kids will be left out and left behind — left in the dust and be sad or anxious," says psychologist Jolie Silva, PhD, clinical director at New York Behavioral Health, where she focuses on kids and parents.

Overwhelm. Feelings of isolation, financial stress, concerns about school safety — or potential hazards while commuting back and forth — can create a powder keg of anxiety for parents.

SUCCESS STRATEGIES

Acknowledge that going back to school produces anxiety. Validate kids' anxieties and try to help them contextualize their concerns. "You can generalize from successful or positive experiences from previous years or educational environments for the next school year," Stein says.

For example, maybe your child was really worried about their teacher last year, but they quickly grew to appreciate them. Or maybe they'd been concerned about not fitting in, but they made a new best friend by Halloween. These reminders instill confidence that they can meet whatever this year brings too.

Lean on your community. Parents with similarly aged kids can be a crucial source of support for problem-solving and stress-busting. Sharing your concerns about the new school year with other parents can prevent you from unintentionally projecting them onto your children. Kids don't need to hear about their parents' worries, which could just generate new anxiety for them, Silva notes.

Additionally, collaborating with other parents can help you offload or share tasks that may not be your strong point — say, math homework — and focus on tasks that align with your strengths and schedule. Maybe you work from home and are able to do carpool pickups, whereas parents who work in an office may have less flexibility, Zeltser suggests.

Devise emergency strategies and know when to ask for help. One way to mitigate safety concerns is by making plans. What do you want your children to do in the event they get sick, are separated, miss a bus, or experience violence?

"Be proactive and educate your child," Zeltser advises. Starting when your kids are as young as pre-K, make concrete emergency plans and ensure that they know pertinent information, such as phone numbers, addresses, and people they can turn to if you're not available.

Keep in mind that it's unlikely you or your kids are going to need this information, she adds, "but at least everyone is on the same page and knows what to do if they need to."

Find the deals. Back-to-school can feel like a financial stretch, so start with easy

stuff: Watch for sales and don't wait until August, when inventory may be picked over. Some schools partner with outside organizations to acquire affordable school-supply kits for students.

Savvy parents often swap items through Facebook school groups or the Buy Nothing Project. If needed, connect with a school resource counselor, who may suggest low-cost or free options.

"It takes a village," Zeltser notes. "Lean on other community members when it's too stressful to do it yourself."

nections they cannot otherwise make. "Kids are deprived of that."

Schedule family time. As kids age and get busier, parents often feel more emotionally distant from their kids — and vice versa. "School and sports and arts and activities can be a lot, and we worry about kids because we lose track of what [and how] they are doing," Stein says. "Talking at dinner, turning off your phones, allows you to be a more active part of their lives."



"Talking at dinner, turning off your phones, allows you to be a more active part of their lives."

Allow children to make (some) decisions. Parents often assume that they need to be making all the decisions, Silva says, but that's not the case. "Your kids are independent humans with their own interests, feelings, and lives. If parents are making 99 percent of decisions about their lives, it takes away their autonomy."

When it comes to things like fashion, books they want to read, or classes they want to take, kids deserve a say. On issues of safety, health, academics, ethical decisions, and more, they're going to need confident parental leadership and guidance.

Avoid overscheduling. Every parent has felt pressure to sign their kids up for activities that will look good on future college apps, but some psychologists say this can do more harm than good. Rest time — that is, no tech — is necessary. Make sure their schedules allow them space to decompress.

"[Downtime] helps with consolidating information, creativity, and problem-solving," Silva says. This allows the brain to make neural con-

Regularly being present and emotionally available with your kids is the most important support you can offer during the back-to-school transition. The quality time you spend together lays the groundwork for connection and strong communication, which will encourage them to come to you for support and guidance when challenges arise during the year — and beyond.

Support your own mental and physical health. The age-old parenting adage holds true: You can't pour from an empty cup. "We need to be well to maintain the wellness of our children," Stein says.

You can start by scheduling your own time for wellness activities, like exercising or connecting with friends. If you find it difficult to disconnect from your kids and their anxieties, you may need to seek your own support — which may include finding a therapist or visiting your primary-care doctor, he notes. 🧘

KATIE DOHMAN is a writer and editor in St. Paul, Minn.



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What Is Breathwork?

People have used this technique to promote healing for centuries. Discover why it works.

BY COURTNEY HELGOE

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER with breathwork was seeing my biological father practice alternate-nostril breathing, or nadi shodhana. He'd spent years at an ashram, so I chalked it up as another one of his odd habits.

Then I started doing it myself in yoga class. Controlled-breathing practices — collectively known as pranayama — helped calm my nerves and clear my mind. I just had no idea why.

Thankfully, I didn't need to know in order to reap the benefits; I just needed to keep breathing.

Humans have recognized the power of controlled breathing for centuries. Diaphragmatic breath exercises feature prominently in the 2,000-year-old text *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. And in *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art*, journalist James Nestor describes

dozens more breathwork practices from around the world.

Today breathwork is enjoying a resurgence. Cold-conditioning guru Wim Hof has us taking icy showers and jumping into frozen lakes with the help of his fast-breathing technique. Many of us rely on the antianxiety effects of a 4-7-8 breath practice. There may be thousands of us lying on yoga mats doing pranayama right this minute.

The calming and regulating forms of breathwork generally involve slow nasal breathing. More stimulating techniques use fast, forceful breath, often through the nose and mouth.

Both typically include some kind of breath-holding. These work, according to Nestor, because breathing is a simple, noninvasive way to access the body's vagus nerve and, by extension, the body's nervous system.

"Willing ourselves to breathe slowly will open up communication along the vagus nerve and relax us into a parasympathetic state," he writes. "Breathing really fast and heavy on purpose flips the vagal response the other way, shoving us into a stressed state."

Cultivating a stress response can help build stress resilience over time, but these methods can be risky. The benefits of slow, controlled breathing, however, are largely indisputable.

Downregulating the stress response through nasal breathing has been linked to a range of health improvements — from better sleep and improved digestion to recovery from chronic lung conditions.

Experience what controlled breathing can do by trying the following methods, adapted from Nestor's book.

ALTERNATE-NOSTRIL BREATHING/NADI SHODHANA

This staple pranayama technique helps balance two branches of the nervous system. (The right nostril is related to the activating sympathetic branch; the left is connected to the calming parasympathetic.) A systematic review published in 2017 found alternate-nostril breathing can lower blood pressure, improve lung function, and support memory and overall cognitive function.

1. Place the thumb of your right hand over your right nostril and your ring finger on your left nostril. Rest your forefinger and middle finger between your eyebrows.
2. Gently close the right nostril with your thumb and inhale slowly through your left nostril.
3. At the top of the breath, pause briefly, hold both nostrils closed, then lift your thumb to exhale through your right nostril.
4. At the natural conclusion of the exhale, hold both nostrils closed for a moment, then inhale through your right nostril.
5. Continue alternating breaths this way for five to 10 cycles.

RESONANT (COHERENT) BREATHING

This slow-breathing practice is among the simplest of all breathwork techniques. It involves approximately five-and-a-half full breaths per minute, with each inhale and exhale about five-and-a-half seconds long. This pace brings the heart, lungs, and nervous system into a state of calm coherence.

Nestor reports that the pacing of resonant breathing also matches the breath pattern of many prayers and chants associated with the world's major religions. As such, he writes, this technique may offer the effects of yoga for people who don't like yoga, and the healing touch of prayer for people who aren't religious.

1. Sit up straight with a relaxed belly; exhale.
2. Inhale softly for five and a half seconds, expanding the belly as air fills the bottom of your lungs.
3. Without pausing, exhale for five and a half seconds to empty your belly and lungs. Each breath should feel like a circle.
4. Repeat at least 10 times, more if possible.

COURTNEY HELGOE is the *Experience Life* features editor.

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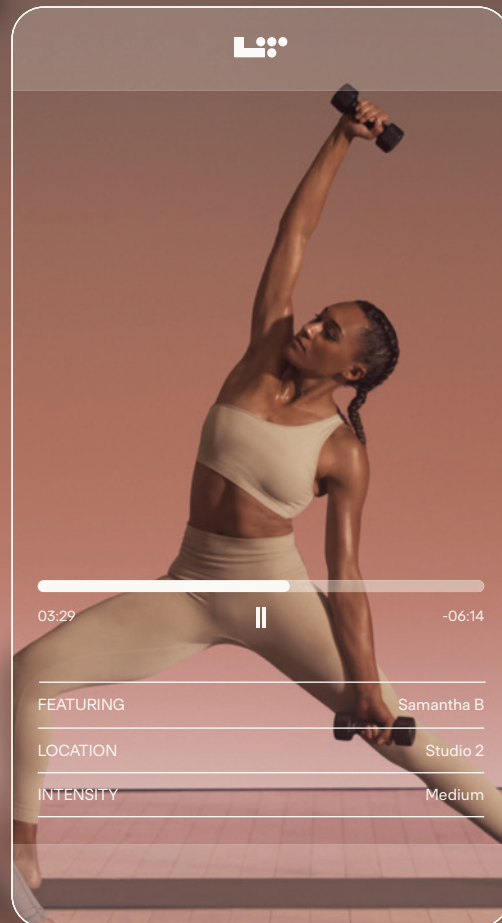


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Support System

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

MORE THAN 25 YEARS AGO, in the early years of Life Time, I often presented health and wellness workshops on exercise and nutrition. One of the common questions people asked me was about vitamins and which ones they should take.

Although I was taking some vitamins and supplements myself, I didn't feel comfortable making specific recommendations. But this sparked my curiosity and sense of responsibility: What was in these products?

So, the team sent some vitamins and supplements to a lab for third-party testing. The results were abysmal.

Some didn't contain any of the nutrients they claimed to provide; others included the nutrients, but in amounts below what they purported or short of the necessary dosage to be effective. In nearly all cases, they were full of poor-quality or artificial ingredients — and hardly any had everything they promised on the label.

That's when we resolved to devote a portion of Life Time's resources to creating a nutritional division to develop a supplement line we could trust and feel good about recommending, especially since government oversight was inadequate.

While the Food and Drug Administration first provided guidelines for labeling vitamins in 1941, it wasn't until 1994 that it established the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act. Even under this statute, though, the FDA is not required to approve dietary supplements before they go to market. Instead, it generally responds when injury or illness are reported.

This process hasn't changed in 30 years, yet the supplement industry has exploded. Go down the supplement aisle in nearly any grocery store and you'll see all sorts of health-enhancing promises. Every year, hundreds of millions of dollars are spent advertising

the health benefits of dietary supplements. For instance, you might see claims that a lentil-size pill can help you lose weight, sleep better, and get all the nutrition you need. (In reality, to accomplish all of that, one pill would probably need to be the size of a baseball.)

People want to be healthy, but it is *hard*. The typical American diet makes it nearly impossible to get all the nutrients we need from food alone; our veggies and fruits are not as nutritious as they used to be.

Add that to other modern-day issues that often increase our nutrient demand — chronic stress, poor sleep, exposure to more cumulative environmental toxins, lack of adequate sunlight, and more — and our bodies and minds are likely missing much of what they need to function optimally, let alone thrive.

The need for safe and trusted health-supportive supplements is greater than ever. It's why now is the right time at Life Time to give additional focus and energy to the nutritional products we've been developing for the past 20-plus years. Recently rebranded as Life Time Health (LTH), our nutritional supplements are high quality, consistent, and effective to meet this need. Each product undergoes regular and independent third-party testing to validate that it contains what's promised.

LTH is one of the company's most exciting initiatives this year, and I'm so proud of the team — Brandon Dyksterhouse; Anika Christ, RD; Paul Krieger, RD; and Samantha McKinney, RD — leading this effort. They each bring unique backgrounds, experiences, and skillsets to this work while sharing an understanding of the powerful ways supplementation can transform lives.

Spend five minutes with them, and they might tell you about a 37-year-old mom who didn't feel well for a year after her twins were born. A Life Time



food-sensitivity test revealed she had digestive issues, so she addressed them with our gut-friendly eating protocol and targeted supplementation. She started feeling better and lost weight.

Or they might share the story of a Life Time performer who experienced one viral illness after another. She started taking our immune-supportive supplements and got through the next winter with no issues, despite being surrounded by sickness.

And, of course, I wouldn't recommend LTH supplements if I didn't take them myself. I have a very robust supplement plan, which changes based on the bloodwork I do with the LTH team. I take nearly 80 pills a day: Some are the general nutrients most of us need (vitamin D, fish oil, magnesium, etc.); others are specific to me based on my biology, physiology, and activity level, among other factors.

I strongly recommend learning as much as you can about your individual needs, too. Talk to the nutritionists, personal trainers, and other experts at Life Time, as well as to your healthcare provider, about your options. Get blood tests done so you know where you might need support; the dosages for different nutrients will be unique to you.

Once you have a consistent supplement plan in place, get your blood retested regularly, and refine your regimen as needed. It may take time to notice a difference, but a good plan is an effective path to feeling your best.



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

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— Pema Chödrön



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