

WEB WARRIORS GUIDE



The Secrets to
a Healthy Life
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Introduction

What Makes a Healthy Life So Difficult?

If someone asked you what the key to a healthy life is, you might respond with “healthy diet and exercise.” You might even include keeping stress to a minimum. Pretty simple, right?

Well, if healthy living is that simple, why don’t we all live a healthy life? The truth is that “simple” does not equal “easy.” So if becoming healthy is difficult, why should we even try? Wouldn’t we just be better off being “fat and happy” and not trying so hard to be healthy? The fact is it’s not a choice between happy and not happy, and it doesn’t have to be a choice between difficult and easy.

It’s a choice between feeling good throughout your whole life or a slow and steady decline in quality of life. It’s only difficult if you try to change overnight. Living healthy is something that you should pursue one habit at a time.

The health and fitness industry keep things complicated with new books and programs coming out daily, much of it with conflicting information. Many books are lengthy and chances are you will lose interest before you can finish those books. This book puts an end to all the confusion.

Making Healthy Living Easier

This book is different. This is a book that you can read in a day. It provides a concise guide to healthy living with plain simple ideas that are both common sense and backed up by science. In order to make positive healthy changes, you need a simple road map to follow. You will find that road map here.

We will cover the 5 areas of a healthy life:

- 
- Eating
 - Exercise
 - Stress Reduction
 - Support Systems
 - Meaningful Life

You'll be able to carry this book around with you to serve as a daily reminder and reference. (see the last page for instructions on how to print this as a booklet) And there is a simple charting page you can print out for tracking your progress on your path to living a healthy life. **Also at the end of this book is a summary of everything you should be doing to live your healthiest life.**

The Reasons to Live Healthy

Living a healthy life will give you a massive increase in how good you feel. You can say hello to:

- Restful sleep
- More stamina
- More energy
- More patience
- Less anxiety
- Lower stress
- More peace
- More joy & happiness

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- Longer higher quality life
 - Lower risk of major diseases
 - Less muscles aches and joint stiffness

A Very Important Note

All of these benefits will be yours and more. If there is something that ails you, following the prescription for healthy living will most likely help you with whatever that is. The most important key is to start slow and build upon your success over time.

It took you your whole life to develop your current habits. Give yourself a good long time to develop new healthy habits. Don't seek perfection on day one or even on day 365. Simply do your best in any given moment. If you make an unhealthy choice in this minute, you have the opportunity to start anew in the next minute.

Be kind and patient with yourself. Give yourself credit for all your little changes over time. And use the tracking tools at the end of this book to record your progress and to keep yourself on the path to becoming healthier every day.

Chapter 1: Healthy Eating

What is Healthy Eating?

Let's start by asking, "what is healthy eating?" Healthy eating is the habit of ingesting foods and drinks that support the vitality of your whole body. When you eat healthy you will enjoy many benefits such as:

- lower incidence of disease
- healthy body weight
- consistent and abundant energy
- mental clarity
- high quality restorative sleep
- mental alertness
- longer lifespan
- more stable moods
- overall higher quality life

When you have these things then your potential for enjoying life is increased immensely. You'll be able to have:

- increased creativity
- increased stamina for work, play, and relationships
- more patience
- better relationships
- more energy to reach your goals

What Should You Eat?

I've read numerous books over the years in my quest to find the best way to eat for both health and fitness. Along my journey each book I read brought me closer and closer to the truth. And here is the truth: eating a plant based diet is the healthiest choice you can make.

What does that mean? This means having your diet consist of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. It also means avoiding or eliminating all animal products such as meats, fish, eggs, and dairy. The advice from "[The China Study](#)" by Campbell & Campbell says it best, "eat a whole foods, plant-based diet, while minimizing the consumption of refined foods, added salt and added fats."

The big secret that has been kept from you is that meat, fish, dairy, and eggs are not safe foods. They are linked to all the top deadly diseases of modern life. Why has this been kept a secret? Simply put, it's a matter of money. The meat-based foods industry has powerful lobbies that work to provide information that is not accurate. I encourage you to discover all the details for yourself by reading "[The China Study](#)" by T. Colin Campbell, PhD and Thomas M. Campbell II. Also check out "[The Food Revolution: How Your Diet Can Help Save Your Life and the World](#)" by John Robbins.

Food Table

Eat as much as you want of these whole, unrefined plant-based foods. Seek out a variety to get all the nutrients your body needs.

Food Types	Examples
Fruits	apples, oranges, bananas, avocado, berries, squashes, zucchini, mangoes, pears, pumpkins, melons, cranberries, eggplant, peppers, okra, kiwi, grapefruit, etc.

Vegetables	
Flowers Vegetables	broccoli, cauliflower, etc
Stems & Leaves Vegetables	spinach, kale, Swiss chard, cilantro, celery, asparagus, arugula, basil, parsley, cabbage, artichokes, lettuce, Brussels sprouts, seaweed
Root Vegetables	potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, turnips, onions, garlic, ginger, leeks, beets, radish
Legumes	beans (white, black, pinto, lentils, garbanzo, kidney, black-eye, etc.), green beans, soybeans, peas, peanuts,
Mushrooms	white button, Portabella, shiitake, crimini, oyster, etc.
Nuts	almonds, cashews, walnuts, macadamia, pecans, hazelnuts, pistachio
Whole Grains (in the form of cereals, breads, pastas - look for "100% whole grains")	barley, oats, corn, rice, wheat, millet, buckwheat, amaranth, quinoa, sorghum, rye, kamut, spelt
Minimize	
Refined carbohydrates	sugar, white bread, cakes, pastries, pastas (non-whole grain), crackers (non-whole grain)
Added vegetable oils	Olive oil, corn oil, peanut oil
Fish	salmon, cod, tuna
Avoid or Minimize	
Meat	steak, pork, hamburger, ham, bacon, lard
Poultry	chicken, turkey, duck
Dairy	milk, cheese, ice cream, yogurt
Eggs	eggs & mayonnaise

★ Source: "The China Study" by Campbell and Campbell



A note about oils, use olive oil sparingly if you're cooking. For foods that are already cooked or prepared like vegetables or salads, use up to 2 tablespoons of flaxseed oil per day. This oil must be refrigerated and you can't cook with it because it becomes rancid at high temperatures. Flaxseed oil is very healthy for you. It has omega-3 fatty acids and lignans both of which your body needs. Omega-3's are a fat that your body uses for reducing inflammation and lowering cholesterol, among other functions. You can eat fish for omega-3's, but you don't have to if you include flaxseed oil and/or ground flax seeds in your diet.

Are You Serious?

Now if you are currently a non-vegan, meaning you do eat some animal-based foods, this may feel like too big of a change to make. Most vegans, people who eat no animal products, felt the same way before they started. And here's the good news: you don't have to stop eating animal-based foods all at once or even altogether. In fact, my advice to you is to make the change to healthier eating over a period of time that works for you.

Simply attempt to make plant-based substitutions for meat-based foods at each opportunity during the day. As you do this over time you will eat less and less meat products. As far as your health is concerned, the less meat-based foods you eat, the better. Why? Simply put, studies have shown that diets high in animal-based foods are linked to the deadliest diseases: heart disease, cancer, obesity, diabetes, auto-immune diseases, and more. The lower the meat-based foods, the lower the incidence of these diseases. (If you're worried about protein, we'll get to that soon!)

The reason why making diet changes can be so difficult is that a lot of effort is involved in learning new ways to cook and eat. When people try to transition from one way of eating to another overnight, they fail because they simply do not have the extra time to learn all the new information all at once. So they fall back into eating the



way that they know is easy, comfortable, and familiar.

Eating a plant-based diet is not difficult. In fact in many ways it is easier since nature delivers a lot of the foods already packaged for us to grab and go, such as apples, bananas, tomatoes, etc. Probably one of the easiest ways to re-learn to cook is to take your favorite recipes and “veganize” them by substituting beans, tofu, quinoa, and other vegetables in place of the meat. I also have some recommendations of good vegan cookbooks below.

When I first heard about the idea of veganism it sounded kooky, far-out, and too extreme. But it made an impression on me. I think it swirled around in my subconscious for a while and then one day I was ready to open up to the idea. Since that time I have striven to eat as close to vegan as possible. I don’t follow it to the letter, but it is the guiding force in my food choices every day. And I can honestly say that I feel the most energy when I eat a fully vegan diet. I feel great and I simply don’t get tired like I used to.

And the food is delicious, so don’t worry that you’ll be giving up taste. You won’t. You’ll be substituting your food choices for ones that are equally yummy. What you will give up is cravings, fatigue, and disease.

Yeah, but What about...

The most common question that non-vegans have about becoming vegan is where will I get my protein from if I can’t have meat? And where will I get my calcium from if I can’t have milk and cheese? The answer is a resounding “never fear!” A plant based diet will give you enough protein without you even needing to think about it. Vegetables have more protein than you realize. And many grains, such as quinoa - similar to rice, and many greens (broccoli, kale, spinach) have more calcium than milk!



Eating a lot of green vegetables can give you all the protein your body needs. You can also get a lot of protein from legumes (beans), grains (such as quinoa) and from nuts. And walnuts are high in the omega-3 fatty acids that your body needs. And here's the really important information, vegetables provide your body with amino acids, which are the building blocks of protein. Your body is then able to use those better for what it needs. Meats provide whole protein chains, but your body has to break them down first before it can build what it needs. So vegetables are a much better way to get your protein! Who knew?!

How much protein do you need? Actually, not that much. You are most likely eating way more than you need. In order to replace all the amino acids lost daily, you only need to 5-6% of your calories to be from protein. If you eat 2000 calories a day that would be only 120 calories from protein or approximately 15 grams of protein. The US RDA prescribes 9-10% of calories come from protein which would be approximately 200 calories or 25 grams.

The only extras you might want to include if you go 100% vegan, are vitamin B-12 supplements and vitamin D if you don't get a lot of sunlight. In addition to being super healthy, Spirulina, a blue-green algae, contains all 9 essential amino acids that your body needs along with vitamin B-12, so that is another option for getting the B-12 you need along with a lot of nutrition.

Remember Why You Should Choose a Plant-Based Diet

With a plant-based diet you can:

- live longer
- feel and look younger

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- lose weight
 - lower cholesterol
 - lower blood pressure
 - prevent major diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer
 - cure constipation
 - prevent and reverse heart disease
 - keep your bones strong
 - and much more!

Here are a few of the principles of food and health as outlined in [“The China Study:”](#)

- “There are virtually no nutrients in animal-based foods that are not better provided by plants.”
- “Vitamin supplements are not a panacea for good health.”
- “The same nutrition that prevents disease in its early stages can also halt or reverse disease in its later stages.”
- “Nutrition can substantially control the adverse effects of noxious chemicals.”

You can't “erase bad eating habits by” exercising.

Taking It Slow: How to Get Started

Start by having one plant based meal per day. The easiest one to start with is breakfast since you can make a green smoothie and bring it along with you on your commute. Here is a recipe for a green smoothie:

Green Smoothie

In a blender mix:

- 2 Bananas
- 1 Cup berries (any kind, frozen is perfect)
- 2 cups Green leafy vegetable such as spinach, kale, lettuce, arugula, etc.
- 1 cup water

A smoothie like this may sound like a lot. It's meant to be drunk over the course of your morning. You might drink half at first, and then at mid-morning drink the rest. This is the perfect breakfast. It's very healthy and will give you way more energy than a cup of coffee! Feel free to modify the recipe, trying other fruits and different kinds of greens. By chopping the greens into such small pieces, your body is able to extract way more nutrients than if you simply chewed it yourself.

You Get to Eat a Lot: Be Prepared!

One thing to know about eating a plant-based diet is that you can eat a lot more volume and depending on what you are eating, you may need to eat more frequently since a fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are so readily digested! This is a good thing, so be prepared for this by packing several pieces of fruit to snack on between meals when you are on the go or at work.

An added bonus is that if you are trying to lose weight, this is the most effective way to do so. Not all calories are the same. 200 calories of a candy bar is going to be processed by your body much differently than 200 calories of fruit.

The sugar from the candy bar will immediately enter your blood stream, and since you likely won't need it all immediately, some of it will get stored as fat. The 200 calories from fruit (or vegetables or whole grains) will be released into the blood stream much more slowly because of the fiber. This way your body can use the food over the day without needing to store it as fat. This is why people who change to a plant-based whole foods diet often lose weight without really having to try.

Helpful Tips

1. When it comes to new food choices, don't think "I'm giving up X." Instead think "I'm making a healthy substitute that tastes great."
1. Choose plant-based choices as often as possible.
2. Choose organic in most cases. If you buy any premium product, it should be your food. There is nothing more important to spend your money on than your health. The food you eat becomes your body. So say yes to a healthy body and no to toxins by eating organic.
3. Always wash your fruits and vegetables well.
4. Eliminate trans-fatty acids. If the package says "No Trans Fats per serving" on the front of the bag, but in the ingredients it says "hydrogenated oils" then you are eating trans-fats. Don't be fooled by that little "per serving" loophole.
5. Flavor your meals with nature's abundant flavorful foods and spices.
6. Eat only a fistful size of food at any sitting. That's the size of your stomach. Try eating every 3 hours or so to keep from ever becoming over-hungry. When you feel famished, that's when you'll be tempted to make poor food choices.
7. Limit/avoid sugar.
8. Avoid caffeine. It will give you a high and subsequent low that can give you the intense hunger that will bring about poor food cravings and choices. Caffeine

doesn't put any energy into your body. It just makes you use your energy now, and that's why the crash always comes later. For some people this is why they are so exhausted the next morning.

9. Know that when you eat a plant-based diet, you truly will not crave the bad stuff. But throw out the bad food, because if you see it, you might be tempted to eat it.
10. Eat consciously. How? First of all, eat with no distractions such as TV or reading. Really taste your food. Eat slowly by chewing each bite at least 20 times. Put your fork down between bites. Close your eyes occasionally and really be present while eating. Listen to your body and stop eating when you are satisfied. Remind yourself that there is no need to hurry. The food won't run out. You can always eat more later.
11. Plan and prepare ahead of time. Plan out what you will eat during the day. Prepare snacks, smoothies, and other foods ahead of time before you are hungry. With smoothies you can either refrigerate or freeze to eat later. A good tip is to put plastic on top of the liquid to keep air out. For best taste smoothies should be drunk the same day or by the next day if frozen.
12. Let weekly meal plans be your guide for grocery shopping.
13. Check out your local farmer's market for organic foods. This is a green choice too because eating locally means it took less fuel to bring the food to you.

Keep Yourself Motivated with These Great Books

I highly recommend reading these books for tons of motivating details on why you should make the switch to a plant-based diet.

- [The China Study](#) by T. Colin Campbell, PhD and Thomas M. Campbell II - Detailed information on the largest nutritional study ever done and its implications for how humans should eat.

- [Skinny Bitch](#) by Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin - A concise volume with powerful facts on why a plant-based diet is best for your health, waistline, and even the world. The style is very spunky, but the message is clear and powerful.

I also recommend reading these books a second and third time as they will provide continuous motivation. It will help you to feel excited about all the good you are creating in your body and your life. They also provide a good reminder of the negative effects you'll no longer have to worry about.

Here are several plant-based cookbooks that I can recommend. Try them out at your local library first and then later on buy the ones that are your favorites. I recommend Amazon.com for great prices and free shipping over \$25.

- [Vegan Express](#). by Nava Atlas
- [Vegan with a Vengeance](#). by Isa Chandra Moskowitz
- [Vegan Fire & Spice: 200 Sultry and Savory Global Recipes](#). by Robin Robertson
- [Veganomicon: The Ultimate Vegan Cookbook](#). by Isa Chandra Moskowitz
- [Vegan Italiano](#). by Donna Klein
- [Becoming Vegan: The Complete Guide to Adopting a Healthy Plant-Based Diet](#). by Brenda Davis and Vesanto Melina
- [Skinny Bitch in the Kitch](#). by Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin

If you want to include some meat products in your diet here is a very well respected book with great recipes:

- [The Best Life Diet](#) by Bob Greene.

Chapter 2: Healthy Exercise

There are several way to move your body that will promote good health:

- Aerobic activity
- Strengthening activities
- Flexibility exercises
- Balancing exercises
- Deep breathing

Of course, if you plan to start an exercise program, do so in conjunction with a check up from your doctor, especially if you feel you may be at risk for heart problems. Start slow and build on your progress each week. Never over exert yourself. And have fun! Moving your body should be a treat and a joy. It will make you feel so good! It releases endorphins, removes toxins, and gives you energy!

1. Aerobic Activity

According to Harvard professor, Dr. Harvey B. Simon, it makes no difference what activity you choose, as long as it elevates your heart rate. So power walking is just as good as jogging. The benefit of jogging versus walking is you can cover more distance and burn more calories in a shorter period of time. The benefit to power walking is that you have less stress on your joints. So choose the activity that you like most. Either way, **do 30 minutes of aerobic activity per day for health and 45-60 minutes of aerobic activity for weight loss.** Your target heart rate should be anywhere between 55-85% of your maximum heart rate. Heart rate is explained below. Your strength training or yoga can count towards your 30 minute daily exercise. Aim to exercise every day, but take a day off when you need it. Listen to your body.



Here's some good news. You don't have to do all your activity in one session. The benefits are the same whether you do 3 ten minute sessions or if you do one 30 minute session. It is also good to vary your exercise, so that new muscles are being challenged every so often. So maybe you walk 5 days a week and on the other 2 days you do something else like play tennis or dancing.

Here are some ideas of other aerobic activities:

- biking
- cross country skiing
- swimming
- tennis
- strenuous yoga
- squash
- hiking
- kayaking
- golfing
- soccer
- jumping (jump-rope or mini-trampoline)
- circuit training

Another thing to keep in mind is that you get "credit" for all the active things you do in your life such as grocery shopping, gardening, housework, cooking, etc. For more information on how much credit you get for everyday activities, check out "[The No Sweat Exercise Plan](#)" by Dr. Harvey B. Simon. To give you an example, mopping or grocery shopping for 30 minutes gives you just slightly less "credit" than walking for 30 minutes. Of course intensity level will make a difference, but this can give you an idea of just how good everyday activities can be.

Heart Rate

Although it's not necessary to be too precise about your target heart rate, it can serve as a good measure of your progress and also the intensity of your workouts. Here are some things to keep in mind. To achieve good health you only need to do moderate intensity activities. This is 55-70% of your maximum heart rate. If you want a more intense workout to burn more calories faster, you should keep aerobic intensity activities between 70-85% of your maximum heart rate. When starting an exercise program, check with your primary care doctor first to determine what is the safest level for you. To calculate your maximum heart rate, use this formula:

Maximum heart rate = $208 - (0.7 \times \text{your age in years})$

Example: If you are 40 years old, then your maximum heart rate = $208 - (0.7 \times 40) = 180$. Moderate activity level would be between 99 - 126 beats per minute. Strenuous activity level would be between 126 - 153 beats per minute.

You can measure your heart rate when exercising by taking your pulse for 10 seconds and multiplying by 6.

Benefits of Aerobic Activities

The benefits of aerobic activities done weekly are:

- stronger heart
- greater lung capacity
- increased metabolism (good for weight loss and weight maintenance)
- increased stamina (you'll be able to do more without getting tired!)
- better sleep
- lowered appetite
- general increase in feeling good and happy

Bottom line: you'll be able to enjoy all aspects of your life with more energy.

2. Strength Building Activities

After age 30, we start to lose muscle mass. By including strengthening exercises in your weekly routine you will enjoy many benefits that you would end up losing as you age. They include:

- higher metabolism (you can eat more, or lose weight)
- greater bone density (less chance of broken bones)
- greater strength (you'll be more self-reliant and confident)

If you've never done strength building before, never fear. It doesn't have to be too difficult or take up too much time. All that is needed is 2 workouts per week which can be done in 20-30 minutes. As noted before, check with your doctor before starting a weight lifting regimen.

Using Weights

If you wish to use weights for your strengthening, I would recommend either of these two books, which have the workouts detailed for you. Both of these books outline a program of weight lifting that uses slow lifting for faster results in less time. Also, they both line up these exercises in the format of circuit training so that you get a bit of a cardio workout at the same time.

- [The 12 Second Sequence](#) by Jorge Cruise. Provides instructions for super efficient muscle building exercises in just 2 twenty minute sessions per week. There is also a corresponding website for tracking your workouts, meals, and progress that is quite helpful.
- [5 Factor Fitness](#) by Harley Pasternak. Fitness plan that combines efficient weight

lifting in a cardio circuit system.

Check them out at your local library. Then if you like them you can buy one or both later. Considering the cost of a personal trainer, it's a bargain to buy one of these books instead!

If you prefer to design your own strength building program, here are some basic guidelines. **Ideally have 2 strength training workouts per week. Have workout #1 be designated for legs, back, chest, and stomach. Workout #2, ideally two days later, should involve biceps, triceps, shoulders, and stomach.** If you are using free weights and if you are varying the exercises you do, the other smaller supporting muscles in your body will also be strengthened from helping you balance the free weights as you lift them. This is a major benefit over using exercise machines.

Using Body Weight as Resistance

You can also achieve fantastic results using just the resistance of your own body. Things like sit-ups, push-ups, dips, squats, and pull-ups are a few that you are probably familiar with. There are also isometric exercises where one muscle provides the resistance while another muscle does the work. If you would like help with designing a weight-free workout for yourself, here are two highly recommended books on the subject:

- [The Miracle Seven: 7 Amazing Exercises That Slim, Sculpt, and Build the Body in 20 Minutes a Day](#) by John E. Peterson. This book provides exact workouts to do.
- [Pushing Yourself to Power: The Ultimate Guide to Total Body Transformation](#) by John E. Peterson. A complete resource. You'll need to take the information and create your own workouts.

Other Strength Building Methods

Another body weight resistance method of building muscle is yoga. Yoga can be as

easy as simple stretching or it can be as difficult as a muscle building workout. To build muscle with yoga, you will need to find a class or video that really challenges you. The nice thing with yoga is that even if you do a strenuous workout, you will still gain the relaxing and meditative benefits of easy yoga. Using yoga to build muscle may take longer in terms of your daily workout since relaxation poses are used in between difficult ones, but the added stress-reducing benefit can be well worth it. Here are a couple of yoga videos that provide a challenging workout:

- [Shiva Rea - Yoga Shakti](#) If you can only afford one video, this is the one to get. Excellent instruction, very intuitive approach, by yogini Shiva Rea. She is amazing to watch. The video is filmed in Kerala India on this very beautiful and unique beach at sunset and at dawn. The music is amazing. The video has a matrix of different sequences which you can choose from to create a custom workout. Or you can choose from 4 different preset programs. Modifications are provided for beginners, but this is strenuous yoga. This is an A+ video! Multiple time lengths from 30 minutes to 90 minutes and more if using the customized matrix.
- [Baron Baptiste - Journey Into Power Level 2](#) Tropical retreat setting. This is a 45 minute class that is strenuous. "Sculpt your ideal body, create a deep inner calm, and transform your life." I like Baron's because I feel like I not only stretched my body and calmed my mind, but I also got a good workout.

Other strength building options are activities that involve lifting such as stacking wood, moving furniture, and so on. Or you can use the highly portable method of exercise bands which offer resistance through stretching rubber instead of weights.

Whatever strength building method you choose, aim for two sessions per week. Just like with the aerobics, start slow, and build upon your progress each week.

3. Stretching

A large, dark red silhouette of a person is positioned on the left side of the page. The person is shown in a side profile, leaning forward with their arms extended downwards, suggesting a stretching or yoga pose. The background behind the silhouette is a solid dark red color.

Our flexibility is something else we lose with age. It is said that your true age can be measured by your level of flexibility. What better reason to stay flexible? If you are flexible you are young. By making stretching a daily part of your life, you will keep yourself young and enjoy many other benefits such as:

- superior mobility
- less straining to reach items
- better posture
- easier standing up from seated position
- less sciatica pain
- less back pain
- less joint pain
- less muscle aches from stiffness
- increased energy from less pain
- less accident prone
- stand taller
- daily activities become effortless

What is the best way to include stretching in your life? Try to **stretch every day for 5-10 minutes** after your daily aerobic exercise. And then **once a week (or more if you like) include a longer stretching session** either on your own, with a yoga video, or at a yoga class. Whenever stretching remember to go slow and breathe. You want to seek a feeling of “release” not pain. Take your time and enjoy it!

Here are some basics stretches to do on your own:

1. **Reach for the Stars.** Reach your arms up to the sky and as far back as you can safely go, either seated or standing depending on your balance level. Alternate

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- grasping with each hand like you're trying to reach the stars.
- 2. Side Stretch.** While standing reach your one arm over head and to the opposite side. You can keep the other hand on your hip or in the air.
 - 3. Touch Your Toes.** Take off your shoes. Wiggle your toes. Now bend at the hip and reach for your toes. Bending your knees a little is OK.
 - 4. Shoulder Opener.** Lean your palms against the wall above your head and bend at the hip to stretch out your shoulders and back. You can also do this via "the child's pose" on the floor. Sit on your knees, fold forward and reach your arms forward.
 - 5. Twirling.** Make circles with your wrists and ankles. Rotate in both directions. Also with each hand alternate making fists and opening your hand wide. Do this back and forth a few times. If you work at a keyboard, you'll be love how this feels!
 - 6. Neck Stretches.** Go slow and gentle with neck stretching. Slowly stretch forward and back, side to side, round in circles, and twist to look over each shoulder. Remember slow and gentle. Only do what feels good.
 - 7. Arm Stretch.** Straighten one arm out in front of you. Now with the other arm pull the straight arm toward your opposite shoulder. Go slowly. If you use a computer mouse a lot during the day, this should feel really good. Keep your hands open wide to make this even better.
 - 8. Arm Circles.** While standing rotate each arm around in big circles both forward and backward. Do one arm at a time. Do this slowly.
 - 9. Seated Twist.** First sit up straight either on the floor or in a chair. Twist while keeping your hips stationary. Twist from your lower back all the way up to your head, looking over your shoulder. A seated twist will work your stomach muscles a bit. For an easier and deeper twist, try lying on your back, lift up your knees, and then let them drop to one side and then the other, keeping your shoulders flat on the ground.

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- 10. Quad Stretch and Balance.** Stand on one leg and stretch out your quadricep muscle by bending your knee and pulling your foot to your buttocks. If you'd like to advance this a bit, bend at the hip to touch your toes while doing this. You can either have one hand on the wall or a chair for balance or go for a balance challenge by not holding onto anything.
 - 11. Hip Opener.** Sitting in your chair or on the floor, cross one leg over the other so that ankle rests just above the knee. While doing this, lean forward to feel a nice stretch in your hip and buttocks. Over time this one exercise can help with lower back problems and sciatica. It's pretty amazing. Repeat with the other leg.
 - 12. Seated Back Bend.** Sitting in your chair you can do this a few different ways. Each of these will give a nice stretch to your stomach and chest muscles:
 - Sitting on the edge of your chair with arms in the air, simply reach up and back.
 - Sitting on the edge, clasp your hands behind your back with arms pointing down. Roll your shoulders in towards each other in the back and lean your head back.
 - If you have a lean back chair, lift your arms in the air and lean back for a nice stretch.
 - 13. Downward Dog.** Create an inverted V with your feet and hands shoulder width apart. Keep your back seeking a backbend position as much as possible. This pose stretches many parts of your body as well as building strength.
 - 14. Butterfly.** In a seated position, bring your feet together and toward your groin. Push down on your knees with your elbows to stretch out your groin.

For a full list of recommended yoga videos, go to my site LifeLearningToday.com.

4. Balancing Activities

A large, dark red silhouette of a person in a yoga pose, possibly a standing balance pose, is visible on the left side of the page. The silhouette is set against a lighter red background that occupies the left third of the page.

Balance, along with flexibility and muscle mass, is something that we lose with age. Practice your balance a little bit every day and you'll be less likely to lose it. Yoga is a great way to build and maintain balance. When you have good balance you will avoid falls, accidents, and will be able to participate in a larger range of activities. Similar to flexibility, the level of your balance relates to your true age. Keep your balance and you keep your youth.

There are several yoga poses you can use to increase balance. **Do one or two balancing exercises each day when you do your daily stretching.** It is important to start at your own level. If you need support when you start doing these, then by all means lean against a wall or a sturdy chair. Over time, you'll be able to increase the amount of time you can balance without support. Here's a tip: a good method for maintaining balance in any exercise is to keep your eyes on a single focal point.

Balancing Exercises to Try:

- **Beginners.** Simply stand on one foot, lift your other foot off the ground, and balance on one foot. As you progress you can add more difficulty by holding your elevated foot up, to the side, or behind you. Hold for as long as you can on each foot. A good way to maintain balance in any exercise is to focus your eyes on one point.
- **Brush Your Teeth.** Do the beginner exercise, but add another activity such as brushing your teeth or brushing your hair. You could even do a little bit of this while you're cooking. Although you probably don't want to do this while shaving! Be creative, but keep it safe.
- **The Dancer.** Another simple one you can do is to stand on one leg. Bend the knee of the other leg and grab that behind you to stretch the quadriceps in the front of the thigh. As you build your balance over time try to touch your toes with your other hand while maintaining balance. It is helpful to keep your eyes focused on one point. Do this for 15-60 seconds on each leg or as long as you can.

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- **Tree Pose.** Stand on one leg. Pull your other leg up so that the bottom of your foot rests on the inside of your standing thigh. Hold your arms either out to the sides or in prayer position. Hold for as long as you can. Then do the same thing on the other leg.
 - **Hip Opener.** This one is a little harder. Stand on one leg. Lift up your other leg and rest your ankle on your standing thigh for a sort of half lotus. Next, reach both arms down towards the ground. You'll be balancing, opening your hip, and strengthening your standing leg muscles all at the same time! For an added challenge, bend your standing knee down into a squat position. Don't do this if you have knee problems, and even if you don't, go very slow building up your strength over time.
 - **One Foot Football.** My family made up this game. It's fun. Get two or more people together at the park, backyard, or at the beach. Each person stands on one foot. Take turns throwing a football or other ball to each other. The first person to put their foot down gets a point. Hopping on one foot is allowed to keep your balance. Keep playing to a certain number of points. The person with the lowest points wins.
 - **One Foot Arm Wrestling.** This is another very silly game we made up. Two people stand on one foot opposite each other. They grab each other's hands like in arm wrestling. The object of the game is to get the other person to lose their balance first. Play up to a certain number of points. This is fun to play on the beach.

If you think about it, you can probably come up with more of your own. Ask a child for ideas, and you'll never run out of new balancing games. If this seems too easy or silly, don't let that stop you from practicing your balance each day. Choose exercises that challenge you and have fun with them by doing them with someone else. It only takes a few minutes out of your day so what have you got to lose?

5. Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is very important to your health and here's why. Your lymph system relies on the contraction of muscles and breathing to move the fluids of the lymph system around the body. Why is this so important? The lymph system has three inter-related functions. The lymph system:

1. removes excess fluids from body tissues
2. absorbs fatty acids and then transports fat, as chyle, to the circulatory system
3. produces immune cells

Essentially your lymph system is the body's cleaning system and defense army. If it's not working properly, you will get overloaded with toxins, feeling sluggish, and you won't be able to fight off germ invaders as well as if you were taking care of your lymph system. And to take care of it, all you have to do is breathe deeply! So, how should you get your daily dose of deep breathing? There are a number of ways including aerobic exercise, yoga, and/or deep breathing exercises.

Here's a deep breathing exercise you can do. Do this 2-3 times a day. Watch how good you feel when your energy and vitality soar from this simple quick exercise.

- * Empty your lungs completely by pulling in your stomach while you exhale.
- * Take a deep breath in.
- * Hold for twice as long as it took to breathe it in.
- * Exhale for 4 times as long as it took to breath it in.
- * Do this 10 times.
- * Enjoy the rejuvenation!

Summary for Healthy Exercise

- **Aerobic activity** - 30 minutes daily for health, 45-60 minutes for weight loss. Target heart rate: anywhere between 55-85% of your maximum heart rate. (Strength training, yoga can count towards this.) Aim for every day, but take a day off when you need it.
- **Strengthening activities** - twice a week. Workout A - Biceps, triceps, shoulders, abdominals. Workout B - Legs, back, chest, abdominals.
- **Flexibility** - 10 minutes daily, after aerobic workout. Once a week for 30-60 minutes.
- **Balancing** - 10 minutes daily, included in your stretching time.
- **Deep Breathing** - 3 or more times a day. (Example: upon waking, midmorning, late afternoon)

Recommended Exercise Books

- [The 12 Second Sequence](#) by Jorge Cruise. Provides instructions for super efficient muscle building exercises in just 2 twenty minute sessions per week.
- [5 Factor Fitness](#) by Harley Pasternak. Fitness plan that combines efficient weight lifting in a cardio circuit system.
- [The No Sweat Exercise Plan: Lose Weight, Get Healthy, and Live Longer](#) by Harvey B. Simon M.D., associate professor of medicine, Harvard Medical School. The science behind what exercise plan is best for health and for weight loss, and also very sensible plans you can implement.
- [You on a Diet](#) by Michael F. Roizen, M.D. and Mehmet C. Oz, M.D. Contains a 20-minute workout that will tone your overall body.

Chapter 3: Stress Reduction/De-Stressing/Managing Stress/ Tranquil Life/ Equanimity

Stress and Equanimity

Definition: Stress

- the physical pressure, pull, or other force exerted on one thing by another; strain;
- a specific response by the body to a stimulus, as fear or pain, that disturbs or interferes with the normal physiological equilibrium of an organism;
- physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension.

★ source: Dictionary.com

Definition: Equanimity

- evenness of mind especially under stress; suggests a habit of mind that is only rarely disturbed under great strain

★ source: Merriam-Webster dictionary

- mental or emotional stability or composure, esp. under tension or strain; calmness; equilibrium.

★ source: Dictionary.com

We talk a lot about stress and how to lower it. We all have stress in our life. The truth is stress is a natural part of life. Stress is any type of pressure or urgency exerted on our body, mind, emotions, or spirit that in turn compels us to take some type of action.

Sometimes that action is fleeing from danger, sometimes it is producing hormones in response to frustration, and sometimes the action is working towards our career



goals spurred by the need to feed our families and the desire for achievement. When we wake up in the morning and we feel hungry, that is a stress that causes us to eat something. When we feel the need to go to the bathroom, that pressure compels us to release toxins from our body. When we fall in love, we are under tremendous stress, albeit positive, to be with that new person as much as possible. So the other truth about stress is that some stress is necessary and good and even fun.

On the flip side, when we are late for an appointment sitting in traffic with other people beeping at us, after being berated by our boss, this kind of stress causes us to do what? We clench our teeth, swear, fume, and stoke the anger in our heart. Maybe later we come home, still frustrated, and snap at people we love because we don't know how to release that stress in a positive way. Instead we displace that frustration and direct it at others who have nothing to do with why we are really frustrated. In this case, both the stress itself and how we handle it are both bad.

On top of this most of us are not getting enough sleep. Studies have shown that people who are sleep deprived, have a more difficult time coping with the road bumps of life. They encounter strong emotional feelings of crisis, calamity, hopelessness, and despair when presented with a stressful situation. Contrast this with people who get adequate sleep. They tend to more easily cope with stress and find solutions. Chronic lack of sleep compounds the effects of our daily challenges, making our stress load heavier.

So there is good and bad stress, with corresponding good and bad consequences. Moderate amounts of stress are linked to positive things like boosting the immune system, preventing Alzheimer's, and preventing breast cancer through estrogen suppression. The chemicals of stress are there to keep you alive. Stress only becomes a problem when it is at chronic high levels. When this happens you are more likely to experience high blood pressure, heart disease, exhaustion, and depression. Ever hear the saying "stress kills?" It should really be "chronic stress kills."



There is good news, though. Even if you live in a very hectic modern life, you can make some changes that will help lower the amount of stress in your life and also soften your reaction to stress, both of which will make you healthier.

How to Reduce Stress

Each day seek to incorporate at least one of these stress-management suggestions. But don't get stressed over stress management! That would defeat the purpose. A few of the most powerful things you can do each day are to simply get enough sleep, smile, laugh, breathe deeply, and take breaks throughout your day. **Each morning make a conscious choice to have calm reactions to stress that day.** This won't keep you from encountering challenges, but it will set you up for success to handle them with grace and equanimity.

Before I list many ways to lower your stress level, I want to take a moment to highlight the idea of simplifying your life as a way to lower stress. Everyone can do this, no matter how hectic your life is. It requires choosing simplicity daily versus complexity, from moment to moment. The best way to do this is to really be in touch with what is most important to you. A basic exercise is to write down your top 5-10 priorities in life. Here are some areas you might consider:

- Values
- Career
- Relationships
- Financial
- Physical
- Mindset
- Creative

- Spiritual
- Travel
- Leisure
- Home & Possessions

Then as you go through your day to day life, put each decision you make through the “simplicity filter,” by asking:

- Does this support my priorities?
- Is there a simpler way to do this?
- Is this really necessary?

Cut out activities, possessions, and obligations that are not supporting your priorities in life.

The Top 10 Ways to Reduce Stress

1. **Choose conscious living.** This means making a choice each morning before you start your day that you will react with calm to each of life’s challenges that day.
2. **Smile.** At every opportunity, smile. Start with a soft smile at first even if it feels silly. Your feelings will soon follow your physiology.
3. **Laugh.** Try a new habit. Instead of anger, frustration, or a sad reaction to life’s challenges, try laughing instead. It can be done. If you do it enough, it will become your nature. This new habit will serve you well. Seek other people who like to laugh and laugh with them!
4. **Get enough sleep.** This should be number one. I talked about it already. Most people need 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. Some need a little less, some a little more. Here’s the litmus test: if you walk around exhausted every day, sucking



down caffeine to keep up, daydreaming about napping, feeling cranky, etc. then you probably need more sleep. Lack of sleep is directly linked to obesity which is in turn linked to many diseases. Stop trying to be Superman or Wonder Woman. Get all the sleep you need and be proud of it.

5. **Exercise Daily.** Take the advice listed in this book. A little bit each day will strengthen your stamina and boost endorphins to make you feel good. Both of these make handling stress easier.
6. **Deep Breathing.** Whenever it seems like stress is washing over you, pop up for a few deep breaths. This will get your lymph system flowing, releasing the chemicals of stress. It will bring oxygen to your brain, allowing you to find solutions better and making you feel better.
7. **Frequent Breaks.** At a minimum you should take a mid-morning, a mid-afternoon, and an early-evening break. They can be 5-15 minutes long. Make the most of it by taking a “meditation nap” where you remain awake at all times. Here’s how:
 - **STRETCH** your legs for 30 seconds.
 - **SIT** on a chair or couch. If you’re at work back away from your desk a bit.
 - **CLOSE YOUR EYES.**
 - **STRETCH** your arms above your head, and slowly roll your head to stretch your neck.
 - **DEEP BREATHING** - take at least 3 deep breaths in and out. Do this slowly and hold in between the in and out breath.
 - **REST** and **RELAX** your face, jaw, eyes and whole body.
 - **BE AWARE HOW YOU FEEL** as you relax.
 - **CALM THE MIND.** Let go of all thoughts. As thoughts come into your mind, just repeat this gentle reminder to yourself “Empty The Mind.” You may want

A red silhouette of a person in a meditative pose, with their hands resting on their knees and palms facing up. The background is a solid red color.

to switch over to a word of your choosing to focus on (mantra) that will help push out other thoughts. Examples of words are Peace, Calm, Rest, Empty, Power, Strength, Love. Any word is fine. In fact the word “OM” can be helpful because it is not attached to other meanings. Whatever works for you is what is best at that moment!

- **IGNORE NOISES** in the same way that you ignore thoughts. Repeat your mantra or the phrase, “Empty the Mind.” Don’t get mad at noises, just flow with them as if they are waves under your boat of meditation.
- **OPEN YOUR EYES** slowly after about 10-20 minutes. Take a few more deep breaths and stretch again: arms, neck, legs.
- **AHHHH**. Feel the rejuvenation!

8. Simplify Your Life. How are you spending your time? What does your average day, week, month look like for you? Write down a rough outline of it. Now, what can you cut out? Appointments, taking on too many extra work obligations, the perfectionism habit, what else? Keep the **things that line up with your values**, that you really enjoy. We can’t do it all, so why not just do those things that you really love? Less is more. Be at peace with this, knowing that you’re spending your time thoughtfully instead of frantically. Consider these prompts to help you think of ways that you can simplify your life:

- What kinds of possessions and services are most important to you? Do you have to own them? Can you borrow or buy them used? What can you cut out in order to free up time and money?
- When you find yourself in a shopping situation ask yourself, “Do I really need this or do I just want it? Could I borrow it or get it used or free and be just as happy? Wasn’t I already fine before I knew it existed?” Then as often as you can, walk away and promise yourself you’ll give the possible purchase some thought later.

- Beware of items that promise to “save you time.” Often you have a method that already works. Discriminating thinking can keep you from buying things you don’t really need.
 - What habits take up a lot of your time that you could cut back on? For instance, could clothes, towels and sheets be laundered a little less frequently? Another example is mindless TV watching. Cutting back on this could free up time for favorite hobbies, life-long goals, resting, or strengthening relationships.
9. **Seek Out Positive People.** Avoid the turkeys and hang out with the fun, positive people who share your values. Work to set your life up so that you can spend as much time with positive people as possible.
 10. **Practice Gratitude.** At least once a day, count your blessings. A great way to do this is to write them down. Write down 10 new ones each day. When you focus your mind on the current abundance of your life, you get to be happy today instead of always waiting for tomorrow.

More Ways to Reduce Stress

1. **Positive Self Talk.** We are what we think. Do you constantly run a recording of self criticism? Even if you say no, take one day to really pay attention to your thoughts. Every time you think something negative, consider an alternative perspective. Instead of the glass half empty, look for where the glass is half full. The silver lining is always there, even though it is hard to see sometimes.
2. **Slow Down.** Stop rushing everywhere. How do you make this change? Schedule less into each day. And, schedule in plenty of transition time between events in your day.
3. **Plan Your Day.** Either the night before or first thing in the morning, take 5 minutes to plan your day. Get your most important things done first. The rest will fall



into line, and you'll feel great at the end of the day. Leave at least 40% of your day open for breaks, transitions, and unexpected challenges.

4. **Arrive Early.** If you struggle with being on time or with getting stuck in traffic, start a new habit of leaving much earlier than you are used to. Leave 20-30 minutes earlier than you usually do and bring something to read or do for when you arrive early. You will feel so good no longer being under time pressure!
5. **Live in the Now.** Learning from the past is important, and so is planning for the future. The problem is we don't spend much conscious time in the present. The present is the place where we find the true joy of life. Children and pets live in the present moment. They notice little things, they wonder about their world, and they delight in whatever they are currently experiencing. If they get hurt, they move on pretty quickly whether it is a wounded knee or a wounded pride. Let's take a lesson from them and aspire to discover this magic daily.
6. **Eat Slowly.** We eat like we live: fast. And look what it does to us. Many of us are overweight. One great way to combat this is to slow down your eating. Here's how:
 - Before you begin to eat, close your eyes and say to yourself: "I will eat slowly and enjoy this food."
 - Take a nice deep slow breath to slow down your pace.
 - Leave work and worries behind while you eat.
 - Eat slowly. Chew your food 20 times before swallowing to help you do this.
 - Really taste your food.
 - Enjoy.
7. **Reduce or Eliminate Caffeine.** Does caffeine serve you well? For some, it does. For many, it doesn't, and it can take a while to discover that. Think about how caffeine really affects you. Does it increase your tendency to rush? Does it make you agitated? If so, you might want to consider cutting back or eliminating it.



Try cutting back for a day or a week to see how it feels. Save caffeine for a treat. Here is a quick way to decaffeinate your own tea, which is healthier than buying decaf tea. Steep the tea bag in hot water for 30 seconds. Virtually all the caffeine will release immediately. Your tea bag is now mostly decaffeinated and you can make a cup of tea that will have just as much flavor and taste better than decaf tea bought from a store.

- 8. Eat Healthy.** Choose plant-based whole foods as often as you can. Watch your energy soar, and hence your ability to handle the stresses of life.
- 9. Forgiveness.** Approach the world with a mentality of tolerance and forgiveness. See the humanity in everyone. Know that everyone is struggling with their own challenges. Be kind and allow them to make mistakes. Then perhaps you'll be able to forgive yourself for your own mistakes, lowering your stress.
- 10. Loving Kindness.** Along the same lines, mentally and actively give love and kindness freely and abundantly to all you encounter in your day, including yourself. There's actual relief when you do this. It feels good to let go of judging others. Hate and anger take so much more work. Let them go.
- 11. One Thing at a Time.** Avoid multi-tasking. Sometimes it is necessary, like if you're waiting for one thing, you do another. But the multi-tasking that involves doing three or more things at the same time, try leaving that behind for one day. Do one thing at a time and do it well. And then do the next thing. Use your daily plan to guide you if you get distracted.
- 12. Spiritual Activities.** Attend a religious service. Take some time to pray or contemplate the wonderful universe we are all a part of. Help with a charity event. There is more to this world than just ourselves. Spiritual activities can help us gain a broader perspective and remind us of what is really important in life.
- 13. Eliminate Toxins.** Avoid or eliminate caffeine and alcohol. Quit tobacco and other drugs. They rob you of energy and slow you down. Escape the city as often as possible for the cleaner air of the woods, the mountains or the beach. Steer



clear of food poisons too. Buy organic produce. Wash your vegetables and fruits. Don't eat trans fats or highly processed foods. They are low on nutrition and high on chemicals. When your body has to constantly clear out toxins, this robs you of energy and damages your body.

- 14. Reduce Conflict.** Let go of anger. Let go of having to be right. Substitute laughter for tension. Try to find long term solutions for situations where there is chronic conflict. If the conflict is too great and too chronically stressful, consider moving on from that situation.
- 15. Let It Be.** What does this mean? It means staying present with uncomfortable feelings that come from challenges such as quitting smoking, arguments with loved ones, disappointments, and more. Instead of running or hiding from them, endeavor to truly feel those difficult emotions. Observe them. Don't fear them or run from them. Instead try to live and learn from them, knowing that the time you spend doing this will help you to heal. Consider these questions and affirmations:
 - What am I really feeling right now?
 - Why do I want to run away from this?
 - Why does this feel bad?
 - What can I do to change my perspective of this?
 - What can I learn from these feelings?
 - I can handle this with peace in my heart.
 - I will be strengthened by this.
 - I am strong.
 - It's OK to feel this way. I don't need to run away.
 - Good will come of this over time.

Do this with serenity and you will discover an inner strength that you will be able

to call upon in the future. Over time you will notice the bad feelings starting to soften and melt.

16. Say No to Road Rage. Here's how:

- **Leave Early.** Always plan to leave 15-30 minutes earlier than you normally would. It's amazing the amount of stress that this prevents. Bring something to occupy your time when you arrive such as reading or writing material.
- **The Power of Intention.** When you get into the car, before you start the engine, close your eyes. Take a few slow deep breaths. Consciously relax your body. Release with your breath any tension you are holding onto. Next, commit in your mind to drive slowly, to remain calm & peaceful, and to enjoy the ride. Finally, smile and turn on the car. This really works.
- **Yield.** Make it a habit to yield to others both on the road physically and in your mind. Assume the best about people. Give the benefit of the doubt. Smile. Wave people on. What have you got to lose? (Not time. Remember you've left early, right?) And, next, expect nothing in return. Do this simply for your own benefit, not for gratitude.
- **Focus on the Journey.** Every time you drive remind yourself that you're not in a race. Wrap your mind around a completely new philosophy of enjoying the journey. Save your racing instincts for when you are running, biking, or involved in some other sport.
- **Kids in the Car.** Make the ride fun. Talk, sing, and laugh with your kids. If the kids are unruly, always start off on a positive but firm note. Appeal to them as if you are all on the same team. Ask them to help you out by not fighting or making too much noise. Refrain from sounding exasperated. Negative energy will make the situation worse. If you don't get cooperation, stay calm. Remember that you are the one in charge. Simply state a consequence that is realistic, time-bound, and that you will follow through on. For instance, if you are going

to the County Fair, don't make the consequence that you'll turn around and go home (unless that is what you would prefer). Make it that the child will lose the privilege of their favorite toy for a day, or something that only impacts the child and not everyone else. Your children will heed future warnings and comply if they know that you always follow through.

Fun Things to Do to Reduce Stress

- 1. Take a Bath.** Or if you are lucky enough to have the means, go for a swim. Water is very healing. It frees you from gravity's grip for a while, relaxing you. When you are relaxed, stress hormones decrease and endorphins increase.
- 2. Release Your Worries.** Allow yourself to lean on someone's shoulder and get your troubles off your mind. You'll be amazed at how much better you will feel. When you are worried or feeling anxiety, your body is telling you to release your worries. Strength is not holding onto problems. Real strength is allowing yourself to accept help from people who care about you.
- 3. Help Someone.** Sometimes when we are chronically and narrowly focused on our own problems, a great way to reset our outlook is to help someone else. This can be as simple as helping an elderly person cross the street, visiting a lonely neighbor, or as involved as visiting a nursing home or volunteering on a regular basis. If you ever find yourself at your wit's end, consider helping someone else. Its positive impact can be profound and you can make a difference for someone else in the process.
- 4. Stretching.** Whenever you feel the tension of stress constricting your body, take a five minute break to stretch and release the chemicals of stress from your muscles.
- 5. Play.** There are so many ways you can do this. You could play a sport, you could put on a mini-play with your child, or you could throw a ball around with your



dog. The main idea is to get lost in doing something fun. The work will wait.

- 6. Meditation.** There have been numerous studies showing the positive health effects on people who meditate daily. Meditation is not complicated. All it takes is sitting quietly anywhere, with eyes closed, seeking to quiet the mind. You can focus on your breath or focus on a word, mantra, or phrase. Each time your mind wanders, come back to your meditation focus. Often meditation can feel a little bit like a struggle, so you think you're doing it wrong. You're not. Just be with that struggle and keep coming back to the meditation focus. If you do this daily, you will notice a calmer outlook on life, higher productivity and creativity. Oh, and by the way, studies show that those people who meditate daily live longer than those who don't.
- 7. Music.** Ah, the joys of music. Slow music helps to calm us; faster music can help us focus. The benefits of listening to music are real and powerful. It can lower blood pressure, boost our immune system, and ease muscle tension. Truly this is a "drug" that is good for us. Enjoy it daily!
- 8. Dancing.** The next best thing to listening to music is moving to it. Have fun. You can't do this too much. And you can't be stressed and dancing at the same time!
- 9. Journaling.** When you write down your thoughts, feelings, worries, experiences, and so on, you are better able to understand your life and yourself. When you have understanding you can grow in your ability to handle stress. By releasing what is on your mind, you release the burden of stress.
- 10. Creative Expression.** What's your favorite creative hobby? Art, writing, dance, cooking, designing, redecorating, crafting, quilting, knitting, car rebuilding, you name it. This is great for reducing the effects of stress on our bodies. If you don't already have a creative outlet, take a class in something that interests you to get started.
- 11. Get a Massage!** Similar to stretching, but even more enjoyable, massage helps to release the tension we store in our muscles. If you don't have someone to give

you a massage, there are few better ways to spend your money!

- 12. Physical Intimacy.** You know what I'm talking about here. It's all good. It's like ordering up a platter of healthy endorphins. "Happy chemicals" in your body can't help but make you healthier.
- 13. Gardening.** This is a wonderful hobby. You are literally in touch with creating, fostering new life. It's creative, it's exercise, and if you're planting vegetables you can eat the fruits of your labor, too!
- 14. Active Meditation.** Many activities such as walking, dancing, gardening, art, (all mentioned already) and other activities can all be forms of meditation. This is because they focus the mind. They stop the incessant worry and chatter of the mind. They are calming. I mention it because any activity that you can become absorbed in can be an active meditation for you. So if there is something that you like to do that is not on this list that helps you forget your worries, then go for it!
- 15. Vacations.** Long or short, vacations are so important for the rejuvenation of our spirits. They take us away from our normal routine. They give us the opportunity to see our life from a fresh perspective. We come up with new solutions to problems that have been plaguing us. All of this is good for our health. Take your vacations, enjoy them, and leave work behind!
- 16. Do Nothing.** Sounds simple, but can you really do it? Can you sit and do nothing? The idea is to be aimless on purpose for a period of time. It's kind of like an ultra-mini vacation that you can take any day.
- 17. Progressive Muscle Relaxation.** Sit or lie down in a quiet place with your eyes closed. Begin by tensing all the muscles of your body at the same time for about 10 seconds. Then slowly release the tension over the next 30 seconds. Then starting at your toes and working all the way up to each part of your head ending with your scalp, imagine tiny bubbles flowing up your body leaving completely relaxed muscles in their wake. At the end, take a moment to focus on a positive intention. Finish up with a few deep breaths and open your eyes.

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- 18. Let go of Fear.** Face it. Observe it. Drop-kick it and get busy living your life. There's nothing to fear but fear itself. If you're really afraid, lean on a friend for support to grow your confidence.
 - 19. Stay Curious.** Ask lots of questions. Always be learning. This will keep your mind young and healthy, warding off memory loss of old age.
 - 20. Keep an Open Mind.** Don't reject things right away, simply because they are new or you've never tried them. Have the attitude of "I'll try it at least once to see if I like it."
 - 21. Do New Things.** Everyday and every week do something new even if it is little. Try a new route, a new food, a new topic to learn, or join a new group. This will also keep your mind and spirit young and healthy.
 - 22. Anticipation.** Create things to look forward to including but not limited to holidays, birthdays, and other celebratory events. This will create positive feelings, hormones, and good health.
 - 23. Believe.** Have faith that making these changes will have a massive positive impact on your life, happiness, and youthfulness. Have patience and watch yourself bloom, becoming less stressed and healthier every day.

There are a lot of de-stressing activities and suggestions here. Try and incorporate one or more of these into your life each day, especially from the top 10. A simple exercise you could do is to write down each of these onto index cards. Then each morning choose one and focus on that for the day. Choose to be calm and kind with yourself and others everyday. It works! And if you fall off the de-stressing habit on one day, just pick right back up the next day. Everybody's allowed a bad day every once in a while!

We can't eliminate all stress, nor would it be good to do so. But by lowering your reaction to stress and reducing the amount of stress inputs to your life, you will add quality years to your life by avoiding stress related illnesses. Life is short. Make it

sweet by enjoying it, even the difficult parts.



Chapter 4: Support Systems

Challenges of Modern Life

We live in a time when we feel like we need to do it all ourselves. Women have babies and go home to an empty house with little or no support. This is common in the modern world. No wonder we have post-partum depression. These women are exhausted. In other cultures, the woman is helped by her extended family or her village for at least one month. For men, there is an unspoken expectation that they should work out their problems on their own, that asking for help is not manly. Our young adult children are encouraged to relocate to far away colleges and jobs, leaving behind their support systems of friends and family. Why do we value this so highly?¹ The truth is that cultivating our support systems is a traditional habit we should get back to for the sake of our health and happiness.

Another downside to modern life is that we are always rushing through life at the cost of really connecting with the ones we love. I think of that song "The Cat's in the Cradle" by Harry Chapin. We miss the "Golden Moments" of life. We miss the opportunity to hear the stories of our father's childhood, we miss the opportunity to learn the oral history our mother has of our ancestors, we miss the opportunity to share the little joys our spouse has at work, and we miss the opportunity to savor the precious budding of our child's mind and personality. We miss these and many more "Golden Moments" with friends and relatives all because we're too busy. Yes, we have to work. But there are a lot of unimportant things we could cut out in order to make room for the important moments.

All it takes to capture a "Golden Moment" sometimes is to slow down for 5-15 min-

¹ A note on children who move far away: I'm not saying that we should stifle the adventurous tendencies, but for those who do move away, they should be schooled in the importance of building a new support system in their new location. And also for those who are not naturally adventurous, they shouldn't feel ashamed of building their adult life close to home.



utes and listen. Or it might be to take a Saturday afternoon to stroll with a friend or relative and talk instead of always rushing to go somewhere. Or it might be saying "yes" to attending that wedding, family reunion, or school reunion. **The time to enjoy life is now. And one of the greatest ways to enjoy life is to connect with people in your support system.**

Support Systems

We often don't give it much thought, but your support system is your family, friends, and other relatives with whom you share a bond of mutual love and support. Some bonds are stronger than others, but as a whole, when you have a good number of people in your support system, this actually has a very significant affect on your health.

Social connections add years to your life. Your friends, relatives, spouse, children, church community, social groups, and other communities all make up your web of social support. The configuration of these components doesn't much matter. Even if you live alone, but have strong and frequent social connections, this will add years to your life just like someone living with a spouse.

Of course, in order to see positive health results, these connections need to be positive and supportive. A supportive social connection doesn't mean that there is never conflict, but rather that when conflict does arise, compromise and resolutions are usually reached.

Studies have shown that strong social connections make you less likely to die prematurely regardless of your age or sex. People who lack social connections, at any age, young or old, are at a higher risk to die prematurely. Why is this?

Your support system helps your health in many ways. One way is when you are in



need of medical care. The people in your support system are there to help you find the best doctor, to ask the right questions, to help you with remembering medicine, driving you to appointments, and providing encouragement. They are also able to mine their social web for recommendations, success stories, and referrals to help you find the best health care possible.

Support groups are very effective at helping people with many goals such as quitting smoking, quitting alcohol/drugs, recovering from abuse, starting an exercise program, losing weight, and reaching other goals. How is it that social connections can help us so much with our health?

When we are with people who care about us, who join us in our play, work, home, leisure time, doctor's visits and more, our body actually produces less of the stress hormones, epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol. These are the "fight or flight" hormones, and too much of these weakens the immune system making us more susceptible to disease. So you see, we do need people. They help keep us healthy. So the next time you're going to do something whether it is easy, fun, or difficult, bring a friend along! Not only will it be more fun, but you'll also be making yourself healthier!

Here's an important distinction about the support we receive: it needs to be welcomed. If we are having support shoved down our throat against our will, that can be detrimental. It is important to maintain autonomy in our life within our web of social support. This also creates good health. There needs to be a balance between self-reliance and dependence on others.

How to Develop a Core Support System

The way to develop a strong support system is to start with your current support system and work outward. For most people this means starting with your family. Here are some ideas to make the connections with your family stronger.

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1. **Make Family a Priority.** This means that you place them before less important non-necessary activities and obligations. Often with work obligations, there isn't a clear and obvious choice. If you have a habit of always choosing work, find ways to cut back on that and choose time with family more often.
 2. **Schedule Family Time.** Two ideas to try out are "Family Fun Day" and "Weekly Family Meeting."
 - **Family Fun Day** – this is one day a week (or some other frequency) where the family does something fun together such as going to the zoo, taking a family walk together, going to the park, going to a museum or whatever your family might enjoy. Activities that allow for conversation are great choices.
 - **Weekly Family Meeting** – once a week the family gets together to share successes, bring up household process ideas, decide on the upcoming "Family Fun Day" plans, and maybe tell a few jokes or even enjoy some music together.
 3. **Eat Together.** Have certain meal times when the family always gets together to eat. Dinner is a good time. Have the TV off and let everyone share how their day went, stories they heard, opinions on current events, things learned in school, and maybe time for counting blessings.
 4. **Pets are Family Too.** If you have pets, they can help with your health too. Share love and play with them for both yours and their benefit.
 5. **Foster an Atmosphere of Kindness and Tolerance.** This is huge. If there is a lot of negativity in your family in the form of judging, resentments, grudges, nasty comments, selfishness, and other unkindness, then the only way to change it is for you to lead the way. Try to lead by example by doing these things:
 - Be kind. Say nice things in a nice tone.
 - Be generous.

- Compliment others freely.
 - Forgive easily.
 - Give the benefit of the doubt.
 - Be as polite as you would be when you meet a stranger.
 - Lead your children with your actions by being kind, generous, loving, and forgiving with your spouse. Your children will mirror you. Give it time and you'll see. In the meantime, be calm and ask your children to behave this way too. Explain to them why it is important, that it's always best to choose kindness. They may protest if they haven't been used to this. Don't fight over it. In all things be understanding with them. When you fail because of being tired or stressed, as soon as you recognize it, apologize. The people around you will mirror that, eventually, too.
 - If you want your spouse to be kind and loving, be kind and loving towards your spouse. Be the change you want to see. Be patient and you will see positive results.
- 6. Special Time with Children.** If you have children you know that it is easy for time to fly by without spending long periods of quality time with them. To offset this tendency, schedule one on one time with each of your children. Let them be involved in choosing what you will do together. Let it become a ritual. Give your time together a name to make it special.

Strengthening Your Support System Beyond Family

Just like with your family, work towards strengthening your existing support system of friends and relatives. And remember although you may not think of work colleagues in these terms, often they are part of your support system too. Build stronger connections with people you really value and like.



All it takes to strengthen your relationships is to spend time together. Sometimes it just means taking 15 minutes to talk with a friend about their day, or other times you might choose to arrange a dinner or an outing. Sometimes one on one get-togethers are fun and other times, a group event like a pot-luck dinner can be a great time. Regardless of what you choose to do, find time each day or at least weekly to make a connection with someone in your social circle.

Building Your Support System

Having social connections outside of our core support system is good too. We never know how life will change in the future so it is important to build new social connections from time to time. Sometimes we lose loved ones, other times friends move away, or maybe we move to a new town. Keeping our support system strong and growing is vital to our health and happiness.

There are many ways to meet new people. A great way is to join a group. Consider these types of groups you could join.

- Support Groups
- Activity Groups – sports, gardening, book clubs, etc
- Charity/Volunteer Groups
- Religious Groups
- Community/Neighborhood Groups

Take a look at your social connections. Would you like to meet new people and grow your support group? If so, take a look in your newspaper under “events and happenings” to find groups to join. Also look for groups listed on Post Office and local library bulletin boards. You can also find new groups through Craigslist.com and Meetups.com, or simply by searching on Google for groups in your city or town.



Another way to grow your network of social contacts is to reach out to people. You could:

- Invite a neighbor to dinner.
- Call an old long lost friend.
- Bring tea and muffins over to an elderly neighbor who lives alone.

Sometimes you can meet new people by attending events that interest you and make it a point to meet some new people while you are there. If you do meet some new people that you like, exchange contact information and then make plans to get together.

Like building anything worthwhile, such as a house or a business or a family, it takes time to build up your social network. Be patient and enjoy the journey along the way.

Action Steps for Using Support Systems to Live a Healthier Life

Each day make a make a conscious effort to connect with at least one person in your web of social support. Stop to enjoy the “Golden Moments” of life at least once a day. Count the blessing of each person in your support system. Our connections with people are the fabric of a joyful life.

Chapter 5: Meaningful Life

What is a meaningful life? It is one in which you feel like you are making a difference in this world for someone. It is a life in which you are following your bliss to some extent. So how do we do this? And why is it healthy for us?

Leading a meaningful life will produce health because doing so will leave you feeling fulfilled and happy. When people are happy in their life, the body responds with internal reactions that produce good health. The way to achieve this is to start off with the intention to live a meaningful life.

The next step is exploring what your deepest desires for a meaningful life are. Here are some areas of your life you may want to think about. What is most important to you in these areas? Jot them down. When you get to the end of your life, what do you hope to have accomplished? What did you want to have done? What would you like to have created? Who would you like to have served? And how?

- Values
- Career
- Relationships
- Financial
- Physical
- Mindset
- Creative
- Spiritual
- Travel
- Leisure
- Home and possessions



This is something some of us try not to think about because we're not living our life according to our dreams. We are afraid that it's not possible or that it will be too much work to make it happen. If that's you, let go of that fear. Doing this exercise doesn't have to take more than 15-30 minutes.

The next thing to do is make a plan to live out your most meaningful life. What are the major steps you need to take to get on the path of your most meaningful life? Write them down! Here is an important thing to take into account: there is no rush. This should be about the journey. It may take you one to two to even five years or more before you are hitting on all cylinders of your dream life, and that is more than just OK. That is a good thing! Why should you expect yourself to change overnight?

Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither should your life. Create your master plan in writing. It doesn't have to be fancy. Then take action on one major component at a time. Take your time and just **make sure that you are working on some part of your plan each day or at least once a week**. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. Celebrate all your little successes. **Track your progress in a journal. And then look back each year to see how far you have come along on your plan.**

Here's an example. You might want to change these things in your life: start a new business (one that has meaning for you), eat healthier, exercise more, start a family, move closer to nature, play more music, and volunteer more. There is much to be done to accomplish all those things! But, it's not impossible. It's only impossible if you want to do it overnight.

So your first step might be to move closer to nature. Then you may focus on the new business for a year at the exclusion of everything else, except maybe some small changes in diet and exercise. During that year you may still be at your old job for 3-6 months getting everything lined up. The following year, when your business is no longer in it's infancy, you might focus on your healthy eating and exercise habits. Maybe



after 6 months you start participating in activities to meet the love of your life. And then perhaps you add in the music. Maybe you start volunteering and that's how you meet the love of your life.

You get the idea. It takes time, but it should feel good. Have faith and know that you will get there! Prioritize your life plan action steps according to logical order and according to what is most important to you!

Take a little bit of action every day towards your dream life. Find meaning in your day to day life. If you don't like your life path, then change it. And do so at whatever pace is feasible for you.

Final Thoughts

We get just one body and one life. Why not live it healthy, feeling the best you can? There are many suggestions in this book. Some may be new to you; others may be familiar and already part of your routine. At first it may seem like a lot. My suggestion is to pick one place to start, such as healthy eating, and then focus on that for 2 weeks to a month before adding other new habits to your routine. Slow and steady really does win the race of a healthy life.

It may feel like struggle at first to fit in the exercise. If you can shave off 30-45 minutes of unimportant activities from your life, then you should be able to fit it in. And you don't need to join an expensive gym. All you really need is a pair of sneakers to walk in. When you wake in the morning, instead of turning on the TV, put on your sneakers and go for a 30 minute walk. Or maybe do 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes when you get home from work.

For weight lifting you can use dumbbells, but even that's not necessary if you use body weight exercises. The point here is, don't let the constraints of time or money keep you from starting. Keep things simple. Some days you may check off all the healthy living elements. Other days it's only one or two things. That's okay! Don't get discouraged. Every little bit counts. Remember it's the first step in building a habit that is the hardest. Every step after that gets easier and easier. So just take that first small step! Star anew everyday! You can do it!

May you live out your most meaningful and healthy life ever!

Share Your Thoughts, Comments, and Experiences

If you wish to share your thoughts on this e-book, please head over to [this page at Life Learning Today](#) to join in the healthy living conversation! Let us know your com-

ments, goals, struggles, and successes! I look forward to hearing from you! 

Healthy Living Cheat Sheet

Healthy Eating

- Eat plant-based whole foods diet. Avoid processed, meat-based foods, and extra fats.

Healthy Exercise

- Aerobic activity - 30 minutes daily for health, 45-60 minutes for weight loss. Target heart rate: anywhere between 55-85% of your maximum heart rate. (Strength training, yoga can count towards this.) Aim for every day, but take a day off when you need it.
- Strengthening activities - twice a week. Workout A - Biceps, triceps, shoulders, abdominals. Workout B - Legs, back, chest, abdominals.
- Flexibility - 10 minutes daily, after aerobic workout. Once a week for 30-60 minutes.
- Balancing - 10 minutes daily, included in your stretching time.
- Deep Breathing - 3 or more times a day. (Example: upon waking, midmorning, late afternoon)

De-Stressing

- Incorporate one or more stress lowering activity each day, especially choosing to live consciously with a calmness, kindness, and a smile.

Support Systems

- Make a conscious effort to connect with people in your web of social connections

everyday. Stop to enjoy the “Golden Moments” of life.

Meaningful Life

- Either daily or weekly, work on the action steps of your life plan to live out your most meaningful life and keep track in a journal. 🦋

Healthy Living Tracking Sheet

[Click here for a Pocket Mod Version of the Healthy Living Tracking Sheet.](#)

Day	Eating	Exercise	De-Stress	People	Meaning
	What did I eat today? Greens, Fruit, Veg, Whole Grains?	How did I move my body today? Aerobic, Strength, Stretch, Balance, Deep Breathing.	What relaxing or soul rejuvenating did I do today? Meditation, Laughter, Creativity, Enjoyment.	Who did I connect with today? Family, Friends, Neighbors, New People.	How did I make a difference today? How did I pursue meaning? At Work, Home, Community, Spiritual?
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					

Day	Eating	Exercise	De-Stress	People	Meaning
	What did I eat today? Greens, Fruit, Veg, Whole Grains?	How did I move my body today? Aerobic, Strength, Stretch, Balance, Deep Breathing.	What relaxing or soul rejuvenating did I do today? Meditation, Laughter, Creativity, Enjoyment.	Who did I connect with today? Family, Friends, Neighbors, New People.	How did I make a difference today? How did I pursue meaning? At Work, Home, Community, Spiritual?
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					



How to Print this e-Book as a Booklet

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