

March/April 2018

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The Bottom of the
Rainbow! The Benefits
of Eating Blue and
Purple Foods

Nutrition



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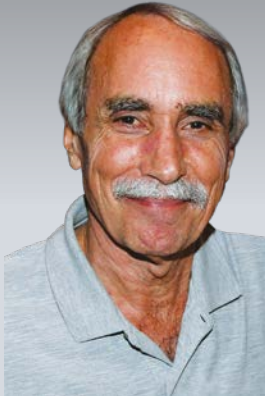
Dealing with
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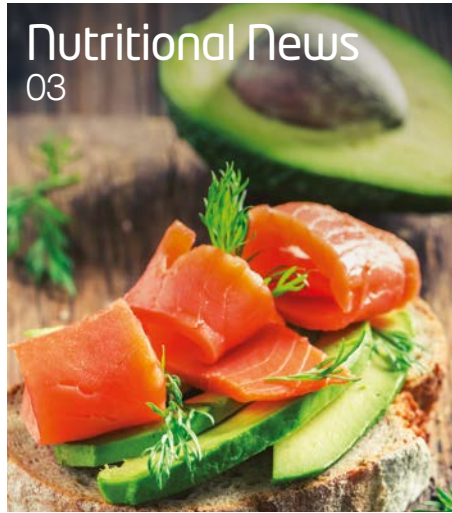
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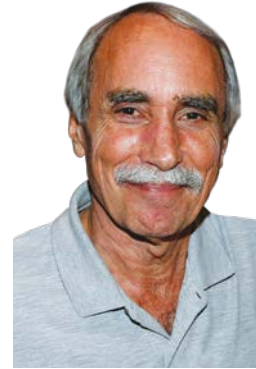
Our lives are intertwined with those of everyone around us. Your actions affect your family, friends and coworkers. And their actions affect you as well. We are even affected by the strangers we walk past every day.

Studies have shown we take on the health characteristics of the people we are closest to. Why is that? Humans are social beings, and we are constantly adapting to what is happening around us. For better or worse, we take on the attributes of those around us. For example, we know that when one spouse lives a healthy lifestyle, the other spouse is more likely to also live a healthy lifestyle.

When our actions and thoughts are aligned with positive, healthy ideals, we bring more goodness into not just our lives but the lives of everyone around us. Of course, the reverse is true as well. We negatively affect people around us when we dwell on bad experiences and binge on junk food too often.

This is a powerful concept because it shows that our thoughts and actions go far beyond shaping our individual lives. Look at the people you spend the most time with. Are they creating positive or negative changes in you? How are you affecting them?

We can help shape the lives of our families, our communities and even the whole world if enough of us decide to align ourselves with healthy, positive energies.



Dwight L. McKee M.D.

Dwight L. McKee
Scientific Director

Nutritional News

Eat More Fat to Maximize Nutritional Content of Vegetables

A new study led by a professor of food science and human nutrition encourages salad eaters to add a little fat to their meals. Using a dressing that contains fat allowed the body to better absorb seven different micronutrients in salad vegetables, including alpha and beta carotene, lutein, and lycopene. This is the latest piece of evidence that a no-fat diet is not as healthy as we once believed.



Brain Training Helps Prevent Dementia

Speed of processing, a specific type of cognitive exercise, has been linked to long-lasting dementia prevention by a group of scientists at Indiana University School of Medicine. When study participants underwent just 10, one-hour-long sessions, they saw a nearly 30 percent lower risk of developing dementia than participants who did not exercise their cognitive skills.

Avocado Toast Is a Delicious, Heart-Healthy Breakfast

Popular in many trendy breakfast restaurants, avocado toast may be a heart-healthy way to start your day. A recent study found that reduced dietary potassium promotes elevated aortic stiffness, which can lead to heart attacks. According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, one in four people die from heart attacks every year. Consuming more potassium-rich foods such as avocados and bananas may help protect against heart disease.



Water Is Key in Fighting Obesity

Research shows that encouraging children to drink water with their school lunches can help significantly reduce obesity rates in children and adults. An initial study of 1,200 elementary and middle schools showed simply installing water dispensers in the cafeteria tripled water intake in kids and lowered their risk of becoming overweight.



Walk the Line

Balance, focus and strength are all qualities we desire in our bodies and minds, and an increasingly popular sporting trend is towing that line. It's called slacklining, and it is a fun way to be physically active while improving your mental focus.

Gone are the days when balancing on a tightrope was reserved for professional circus entertainers or daring neighborhood kids pulling their jump lines taut; now, everyday adults are enjoying the challenge. And with good reason. The health benefits of slacklining include core strengthening, balance improvement, better posture alignment and mental clarity.

First, let's review the physical aspects of slacklining.

Slacklining is a workout that incorporates all major muscle groups. Standing and walking across a line requires that your core move precisely in order to stabilize your extremities. Think about how a baby who is learning to walk uses their whole body. Their arms often are arched out to their sides, their hips and bellies twist back and forth as they propel their legs forward. While the legs take much of the credit for walking, learning to walk requires the core and arms to also participate in maintaining the movement.

Because slacklining is a full-body workout, the muscle groups must work together in balance and harmony. All your muscle groups must be concentrated on circumventing you from tumbling off the wobbling line. Because the slackline is flexible and not fully stable, you'll need to use a lot of coordination to stay up on the line. Balance is important throughout our lives, and research has shown that slacklining is beneficial for improved balance.¹

But you can't have proper balance without core strength. Over time, slacklining helps you improve your core. While your legs are doing a lot of the work, your core is facilitating the communication between your upper and lower body to stay on the line. When you walk across the line, your core tightens and contracts to bring both your legs and your arms and shoulders toward the center.

With a stronger core comes better posture. Slacklining not only activates your abdominal muscles, it also utilizes your back muscles and the muscles enveloping your spine.

Scientists have found a significant improvement in postural stability when a group of test subjects participated in slackline training.² The control group showed no improvements. In fact, another study demonstrated slackline training to be particularly beneficial to the postural strength of older adults, and in turn the study's researchers determined it could be a contributor to the reduction of falls in the older population.³

Another study took it a step further and found there were significant benefits to patients with Parkinson's disease, preventing falls due to slacklining's role in postural stability.⁴

Now, let's examine the mental benefits.

Similar to yoga or tai chi, slacklining enthusiasts report a meditative quality to the sport. Meditation aims to focus on the present moment by either letting go of thoughts and focusing on qualities such as breathing or movement of the body.

With slacklining, you must bring concentration in and become centered in the moment. Coupled with that inner focus is the need to push that meditative energy outward into the physical activity at hand.



Activities such as slacklining that require the mix of inner focus with intentional and deliberate physical movement help put a leash on your meandering thoughts. You must concentrate with undivided attention to walk the unsteady cord successfully. Done daily, this is good practice for sharpening your focus, not just on the line but throughout your life.

Such meditative concentration and deliberate focus can lead to increased memory function. One study found that slacklining aided increasing the structural and functional flexibility of the hippocampus,⁵ an area of the brain responsible for navigation and memory.

¹ Keller, M, et al. "Improved postural control after slackline training is accompanied by reduced H-Reflexes." *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 22 Aug. 2012, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21385217.

² Thomas, M, and M Kalicinski. "The Effects of Slackline Balance Training on Postural Control in Older Adults." *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 24 July 2016, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26583953.

³ Santos, L, et al. "Effects of supervised slackline training on postural instability, freezing of gait, and falls efficacy in people with Parkinson's disease." *Disability and Rehabilitation*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Aug. 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27416005.

⁴ Hüfner, K, et al. "Structural and functional plasticity of the hippocampal formation in professional dancers and slackliners." *Hippocampus*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Aug. 2011, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20572197.

⁵ Dordevic, M, et al. "Improvements in Orientation and Balancing Abilities in Response to One Month of Intensive Slackline-Training. A Randomized Controlled Feasibility Study." *Frontiers in human neuroscience*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 10 Feb. 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28239345.



Finally, there are some bonus benefits. These are the benefits that focus less on hard science and instead are just good for your spirit.

Slacklining takes place outside. While hard science shows us that vitamin D from the sun is essential for a myriad of health benefits, being outdoors exposes us to more of it, which in turn is just good for us psychologically. Outdoor activity, particularly during the morning hours of sun, helps boost our immune system and trigger hormonal reactions that boost our moods. Cultivating an appreciation for the outdoors is good for our spirit.

A famous study compared two groups of people who partook in a stress-inducing and difficult task. The researchers then showed photos of nature to one group and photos of urban scenes to another. The group who saw the nature photographs reported feeling happy, joyful and friendly, while the urban scenes group felt sadness.⁶

Participating in activities that require us to be outdoors can diminish stress levels. Furthermore, a feeling of connection to the earth is good for our society as a whole.

Often slacklining is done in groups—almost like a noncompetitive game. Group exercise helps motivate us to continue the activity. Social interactions with activity are key for increasing more positivity. Since slacklining is less mainstream and not as commonly seen practiced, imagine doing it at a local park where others might inquire and want to join in, or inviting neighbors over for an attempt at it. It is a unique activity, and people might show curiosity.

And slacklining is affordable. While a lot of novel activities can be pricey, with slacklining all you need to purchase is a line! Specialty slackline lines run about \$50 online. There are no special clothes, shoes or other equipment needed, though two well-placed trees can be quite handy. There are no class prices or gym memberships.

Trying a new activity can sometimes feel intimidating, but slacklining is a simple and leisurely one that benefits the mind and body. It can be meditative, strengthening and fun!

⁶ Ulrich, Roger S. "Natural Versus Urban Scenes." *Environment and Behavior*, vol. 13, no. 5, 1981, pp. 523–556, doi:10.1177/0013916581135001.

Feature article

Mind **Affects** Matter

Are you aware of just how much stress, depression and anxiety can affect your body's ability to function properly?



Stress is a natural part of the human life experience. It can sometimes be positive stress and serve as a motivating factor to move us forward toward growth and/or progress. It can be an impetus toward positive change and behavior modification in both our personal lives and in society as a whole.¹ However, more often chronic stress is an element in our lives that can contribute to anxiety, depression and poor health outcomes.

In fact, depression and/or anxiety, stress and poor health are intricately linked and can create a snowball effect.

More stress can lead to more anxiety, which can lead to more illness. Similarly, poor health can cause more stress on the body and mind, which can lead to more depression or anxiety.² It's a two-way relationship. Anxiety, worrying and fear are related to negative stress. Situations involving fear and worrying can cause stress, and stress can cause feelings of fear and worrying. Worrying and ruminating in your mind about difficult experiences, situations or interactions is one of the most common forms of chronic stress.

Negative stress can be acute (momentary, fleeting and temporary) or chronic (long-term and persistent). Having a coworker out sick for a few weeks may be a temporary stressor as you take on more of his or her workload while they recuperate. Being at a workplace with a toxic environment (either physically and/or emotionally or socially toxic) can be a source of more constant and ongoing stress. A little bit of stress can keep us on our toes, while chronic stress can harm our health.

Why is stress bad for your health? Stress is not just a feeling or an emotion. Stress is a physical response to a challenge that pulsates through your whole being. Stress activates your body's "fight, flight or freeze," or "stress response," mechanism. Your adrenal glands will release the hormones cortisol, adrenaline (also known as epinephrine) and norepinephrine (otherwise known as norepinephrine) into your system.³ When exposed to stress for too long or too often, this persistent response mode of operating can damage your body's cells and organs.

¹ Kirby, E D, et al. Acute stress enhances adult rat hippocampal neurogenesis and activation of newborn neurons via secreted astrocytic FGF2. U.S. National Library of Medicine, 16 Apr. 2013, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23599891.

² Wang, S, et al. "Job Stress in Young Adults Is Associated with a Range of Poorer Health Behaviours in the Childhood Determinants of Adult Health (CDAH) Study." *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Nov. 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29166291.

³ Richard P. Dum, David J. Levinthal, Peter L. Strick. Motor, cognitive, and affective areas of the cerebral cortex influence the adrenal medulla. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 2016; 201605044 DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1605044113.

Every aspect of the stress response is designed to prepare our bodies for maximal physical effort—to either stay hidden or, failing that, have to fight or escape.

However, few of the situations in modern life that trigger this "hard wiring" of the human nervous system (such as someone cutting you off in traffic) are followed by maximal physical effort, which creates a major disconnect in our physiology. Adrenaline, or epinephrine, causes your heart to beat faster and harder. This in turn raises your blood pressure. Cortisol prevents your blood vessels from functioning in their normal capacity.⁴ This dangerous combination increases your chances of a stroke (now being referred to as a "brain attack") or heart attack.⁵ A long-term, large-scale study conducted by a group of cardiologists found that stress increases the risk of a heart attack by overusing the part of the brain that deals with fear.⁶ If all stress responses involved intensive physical activity, it would actually be quite good for us; but unfortunately, that's rarely the case in modern life.

These same hormones affect the respiratory system by increasing the rate of respirations (breathing more quickly) and the work of breathing (breathing harder).

People with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease will be particularly affected by these stress-induced patterns of breathing. Someone with anxiety might hyperventilate in the midst of a panic attack.⁷

The brain-belly connection is a strong one. Think about the butterflies-in-your-stomach sensation you feel when you're excited or slightly nervous about something. Or more seriously, that stomach churning or even nausea you've felt when you've heard bad news.

⁴ Henry, James P. "Biological basis of the stress response." SpringerLink, Springer-Verlag, Feb. 1991, link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2FBF02691093?LI=true%3Fxid.

⁵ Workman, Edward A., and John R. Hubbard. *Handbook of stress medicine: an organ system approach*. Chapter 2, "Mental Stress and the Cardiovascular System." CRC, 1998.

⁶ Tawakol, A, et al. "Relation between resting amygdalar activity and cardiovascular events: a longitudinal and cohort study." *Lancet* (London, England), U.S. National Library of Medicine, 25 Feb. 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28088338.

⁷ Workman, Edward A., and John R. Hubbard. *Handbook of stress medicine: an organ system approach*. Chapter 3, "The Effects of Stress on the Respiratory System." CRC, 1998.



When we experience chronic anxiety or depression, that connection can slow down your gastrointestinal system, impeding digestion and how food moves through your system.⁸

Additionally, anxiety, depression and stress can alter the configuration and role of the bacteria in your gastrointestinal tract.⁹

And besides the internal workings of your midline, depression, anxiety and chronic stress often affects your waistline. Cortisol—the hormone we previously noted—often increases appetite and cravings for high-caloric foods. When we eat less healthy foods, or comfort foods—especially without the heavy physical exertion that kept our ancestors alive and well—that contributes to belly fat, which increases the risk of a multitude of our modern plague of noninfectious diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, arthritis, dementia and autoimmune diseases.

Stress hormones also affect your immune system. When your body detects a threat—be it physical, like a respiratory virus, or emotional, like losing your job—that stress response mentioned earlier releases the stress hormones that help amp up the immune system to prevent illness and then heal.

⁸ Konturek, P C, et al. "Stress and the gut: pathophysiology, clinical consequences, diagnostic approach and treatment options." *Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology* : an official journal of the Polish Physiological Society, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Dec. 2011, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22314561.

⁹ Lyte, M, et al. "Stress at the intestinal surface: catecholamines and mucosa-bacteria interactions." *Cell and tissue research*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Jan. 2011, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20941511.

That process is often a positive thing. But the trouble with depression or anxiety is that it keeps the body in a nearly constant fight, flight or freeze mode. While our immune system is always working to keep us healthy, the additional pressure that depression, anxiety or stress places on it makes it less effective when exposed to an illness. And cortisol specifically suppresses the immune system, leading to increased risk of illness and inflammation.¹⁰

Furthermore, stress, depression and anxiety can contribute to sexual dysfunction, hair loss, acne breakouts, body pains, headaches, fatigue, forgetfulness and mood swings.

Stress, sadness and anxious moments are inevitable components of life. No matter how secure your job is, how peaceful your family life is or how much money you have, you will always face stressful and trying times. For your brain, body and health, it is essential to learn how to respond to stress, sadness and anxiety-provoking experiences in a way that promotes calmness, kindness and self-control. Instead of taking in those situations as extreme threats, see them as challenges to live with, work through and overcome.

This is where the mind-body connection can work toward our advantage. The power of the mind is the absolute key in protecting you from depression, stress and anxiety. Unlike other mammals whose response to stress and anxiety is quite literally fight, flight or freeze, we humans have the added advantage of being able to have higher-level thinking and reasoning to work through a stressful situation. That is where the old adage of "mind over matter" has some significant weight.

Activities like yoga, dancing, Pilates or more meditative martial arts all have a calming effect. Mindfulness meditation, with the express purpose of clearing the mind, is also beneficial to combating depression and anxiety. Meditation works by lowering the cortisol levels in the bloodstream.¹¹ Yoga works similarly, and some research has suggested its use as a powerful antidepressant tool.¹² Progressive muscle relaxation exercises or guided imagery can help us live in the present and not worry about the future or ruminate on the past.¹³

Social interactions with positive people or even pets are also key to elevating our depressive moods or calming our anxieties.

Oxytocin is nicknamed the hormone of love as it is often released during moments of deep social connection. And it doesn't even have to be another human being! One study demonstrated that gazing into the eyes of and/or simply petting your dog or cat increases the amount of oxytocin released into your bloodstream.

¹⁰ Segerstrom, Suzanne C., and Gregory E. Miller. "Psychological Stress and the Human Immune System: A Meta-Analytic Study of 30 Years of Inquiry." *Psychological bulletin*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, July 2004, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/articles/PMC1361287/.

¹¹ Turakitwanakan, W, et al. "Effects of mindfulness meditation on serum cortisol of medical students." *Journal of the Medical Association of Thailand = Chotmaihet thangphaet*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Jan. 2013, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23724462.

¹² Thirthalli, J, et al. "Cortisol and antidepressant effects of yoga." *Indian Journal of Psychiatry, Medknow Publications & Media Pvt Ltd*, July 2013, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/articles/PMC3768222/.

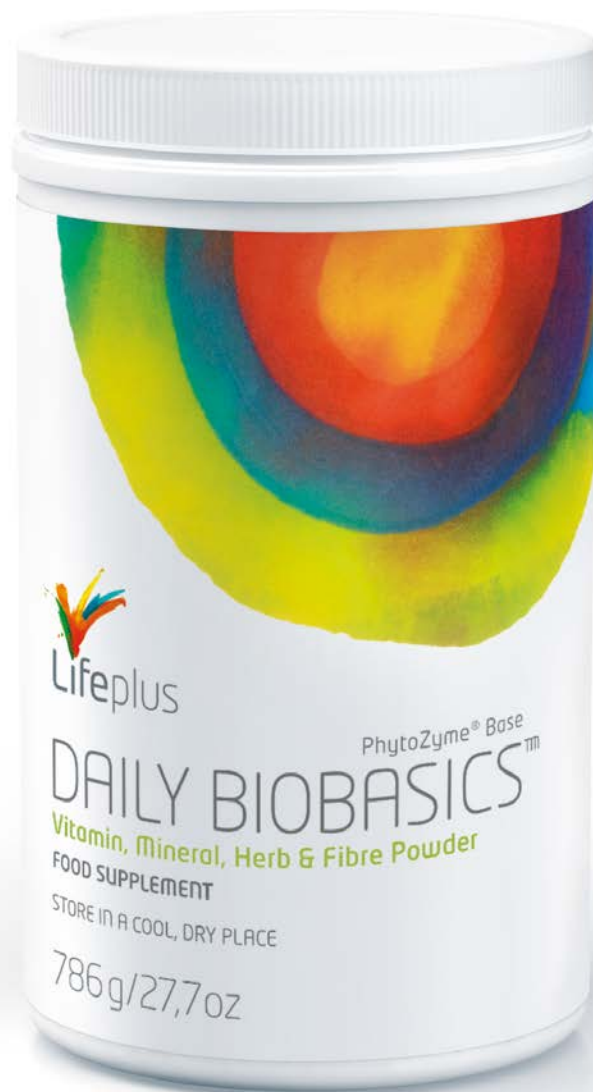
¹³ Lolak, Sermak, et al. "Effects of Progressive Muscle Relaxation Training on Anxiety and Depression in Patients Enrolled in an Outpatient Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program." *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, Karger Publishers, 25 Jan. 2008, www.karger.com/Article/Abstract/112889.

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Food supplements should not be used as a substitute for a varied diet.

From Acorns to Oak Trees— How Small, Positive Changes Can Have Big Effects on Our Wellbeing

These days we all hear about self-care, as it has become increasingly recognized as essential for dealing with daily life and a popular theme in mainstream health culture. What does it entail exactly, and how do you make time for it?

A popular hashtag on social media currently is #treatyourself, which usually accompanies photos of manicures or selfies of a face mask on. Those of us who have responsibility for caring for others—either professionally or in our home life—might find it difficult to step back and turn that nurturing habit inward. Or we may be put off by the time and money involved in various self-care activities such as massages or spa treatments (which of course are wonderful treats for our wellbeing). No need to book an appointment for an Amazonian mud bath or a Reiki session right this moment. Instead, many of the small actions you do in your everyday life help set the tone for a healthier mind, body and spirit.

Sleep is perhaps of first and foremost importance when realizing self-care as an essential way of life.

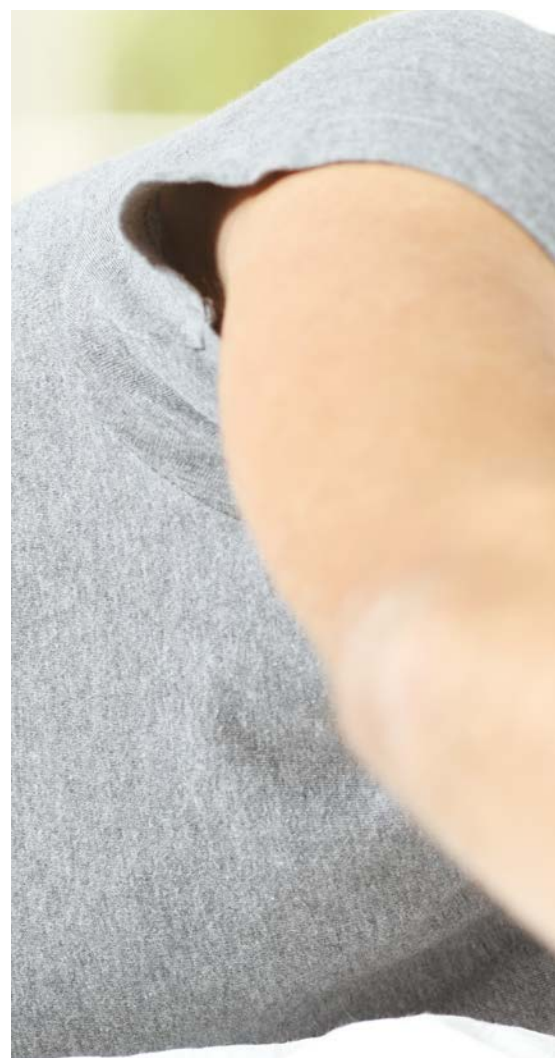
It is broadly recognized that the optimal amount of uninterrupted, nightly sleep is at least eight hours. But many adults end up clocking in about six hours a night, which is entirely insufficient for an overwhelming majority of the population. Lack of sleep is a contributing factor to depression, anxiety, poor decision-making, mood swings and even physical health, including increased appetite and weight gain. You see, the body takes that long, uninterrupted time at night to repair itself.

A concept in the health care and self-care worlds is “sleep hygiene.” This includes going to bed at the same time every night and waking up at the same time every morning. Nature is full of rhythms and cycles—just think of the seasons, the seas’ tides, the phases of the moon. Your body is no different. Having a routine or rhythm helps your body know when it is time to rest and repair. Other ideas in sleep hygiene include eliminating your exposure to stimulating things a few hours before bed—such as screens (computers, phones, TVs), caffeine or sugary foods.



Try to have a winding-down period about an hour prior to bed, during which you have soft lighting, do gentle stretching and breathing, take a warm bath, and/or drink warm chamomile or lavender tea.

People who get enough activity during the day report getting better sleep at night. So move and be active for better self-care. It is well-known that exercise helps mitigate feelings of stress and sadness. But even if you don't have too many stressors in your life, regular activity is a wonderful time to get some focused alone time to rest and repair.



While some people are energized by periods of solitude, even introverts can get positive energy from building meaningful relationships. The keyword here is *meaningful*. Relationships that give us hope, loving perspective and fresh ideas are motivating and nurturing to our souls. If you have a friend you haven't heard from in a while, make the first move and call him or her. When you know someone who is going through a tough time, be the listening and nonjudgmental ear they can work through their issues with. Try to have as much relationship building occur in person versus over the phone or by texting. That face-to-face interaction is how human relationships have been built since the beginning of time; only recently has it changed to brief texts or quick phone calls. Have tea with a friend or make time to go on a walk in a park together for an hour.



Practice kindness and be generous. While it is great to volunteer or donate money to good causes, everyday acts of humility, thoughtfulness and altruism are what sustain us and our world. Instead of being on your phone at the grocery store checkout, talk and make eye contact with the clerk. Express thanks and gratitude to city sanitation workers, janitors and garbage workers. Shovel your neighbor's front sidewalk when you shovel yours. Any small act, while seemingly focused on others, helps your spirit too.

Finally, in all areas of your life, intentionally cultivate the practice of gratitude. It doesn't have to be a phony-feeling announcement to others. It can be a quiet moment at the end of your day during which you recount the blessings and fortunes you have in your life.



Many find it helpful to keep a multiyear gratitude journal. You can have a date listed for every day of the year, and you write one sentence that exemplifies your gratitude for that day.

The multiyear manner of doing this helps you reflect on what you were grateful for over the course of several years.

Small acts lead to tremendous changes. A snowflake is tiny and delicate. A large mass of snowflakes is a blizzard! And so it is with self-care. Behaviors and actions that seem tiny truly can create a storm of positivity in our lives.



The Bottom of the Rainbow!

The Benefits of Eating Blue and Purple Foods

Vegetables are the most varied and versatile food group. Mashed, roasted, sautéed, pureed, steamed, grilled, or fresh and raw, there are endless ways to prepare and enjoy them as part of your healthy diet. When we think of standard vegetables, we think of green broccoli, orange carrots, red tomatoes, yellow onions, or orange pumpkins and squash. Similarly, when we think of common fruits we may think of red or green apples, oranges or yellow bananas.

But the purple and blue (and sometimes nearly black!) shades of vegetables are becoming increasingly popular at farmers markets and restaurants. Not only are they visually unique and novel to eat, these darker hued fruits and vegetables are also unique from a nutritional standpoint.

The unique difference that blue and purple foods possess are higher amounts of flavonoid pigments called anthocyanins. Anthocyanins are what impart the color to blue, purple and red plants.^{1,2} There have been multiple studies and research done on the health benefits of anthocyanins, and much of the research is in agreement and conclusive that these are powerful components of health.

Anthocyanins positively contribute to health and wellbeing by acting as an antioxidant, helping to boost the immune system and combat heart disease.³ Other research has shown improvements in vision (particularly night vision), cognition and memory, and age-associated deterioration in neurological function. It is believed that most of the positive health effects gained from consumption of these flavonoids are due to their anti-oxidative properties and their ability, in conjunction with other chemicals, to fight against free radical attacks on the body.^{4,5}

They also aid weight management because they contribute to boosting metabolism and regulating blood sugar, helping to manage diabetes.⁶ Anthocyanin-containing foods are usually packed with fiber to help you feel fuller longer. Studies have looked at the slimming effect anthocyanins had on laboratory mice that were fed a high-fat diet.⁷ The mice who had a higher intake of anthocyanins not only saw a significant decrease in their body weight—a difference of 20 percent—but also saw improved cholesterol levels and lower blood glucose.

When most people think of purple or blue foods they may think of blueberries. Add to that “list” other dark fruits like blackberries, figs, plums and black grapes.



The many vegetable varieties that go on the list are red (really, it's purple!) cabbage, the skin of eggplant, blue potatoes, purple carrots, red (also more purple in hue) onions, purple cauliflower, black bell peppers and purple tomatoes.

Some ideas for eating purple is the go-to idea of adding berries in your morning smoothie. But venture beyond that by using red cabbage in your cabbage and noodles dish, or maybe prepare some cauliflower “steaks,” which are popular with some home cooks.

Get a purple cauliflower, slice it from the top of the head to the bottom of the stalk in large, one-and-half-inch slices, drizzle some olive oil on it, add salt and pepper, and then bake it until tender.

You could also cube up some blue potatoes; toss them with coconut oil, oregano and rosemary; and roast them as you would regular potatoes. Slice up fresh figs and plums to add to your yogurt.

Aside from finding these novel foods at the grocery store or farmers market, try growing your own in your garden! Look for heirloom variety seeds for your summer garden so you can grow your own purple or black peppers or purple carrots. You can easily find heirloom seeds for planting purple tomatoes—two more common varieties are called Cherokee Purple or Indigo Rose—to add to your summer salads.

The good news is that there is a plethora of benefits of blue and purple produce, as well as an abundance of ways to consume and incorporate them into your daily intake. Furthermore, they are often delicious and provide a visual “wow” when cooking with and for others.

¹ He, J, and M M Giusti. “Anthocyanins: natural colorants with health-promoting properties.” Annual review of food science and technology, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2010, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22129334.

² Lila, Mary Ann. “Anthocyanins and Human Health: An In Vitro Investigative Approach.” Journal of Biomedicine and Biotechnology, Hindawi Publishing Corporation, 1 Dec. 2004, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1082894/.

³ Konczak, Izabela, and Wei Zhang. “Anthocyanins—More Than Nature’s Colours.” Journal of Biomedicine and Biotechnology, Hindawi Publishing Corporation, 1 Dec. 2004, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1082903/.

⁴ Prior, R L. “Fruits and vegetables in the prevention of cellular oxidative damage.” The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Sept. 2003, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12936951.

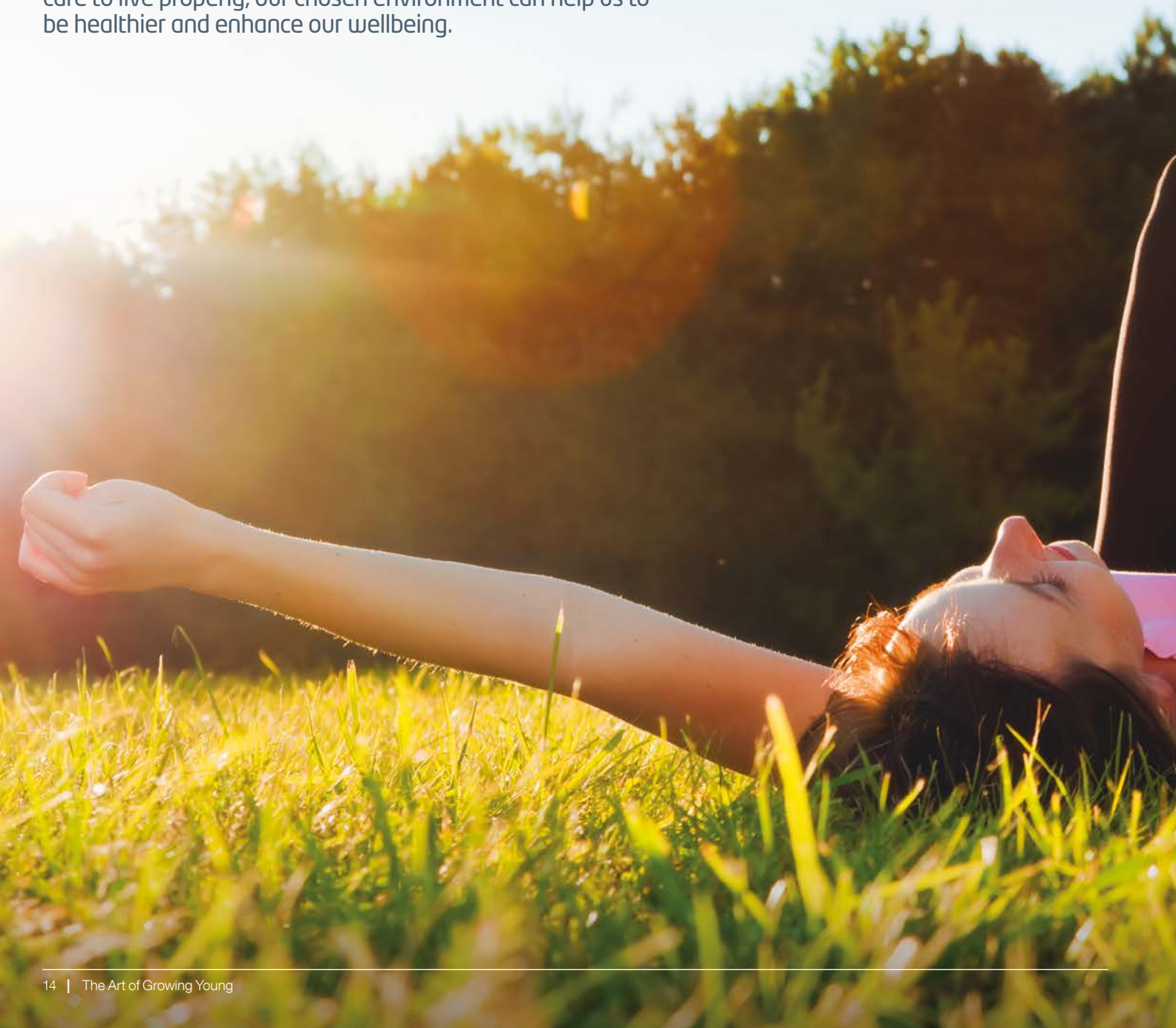
⁵ Joshi, R, et al. “Anthocyanins-enriched purple tea exhibits antioxidant, immunostimulatory and anticancer activities.” Journal of Food Science and Technology, U.S. National Library of Medicine, June 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28720952.

⁶ Jankowski, A, et al. “The effect of anthocyanin dye from grapes on experimental diabetes.” Folia Medica Cracoviensia, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2000, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11339016.

⁷ Wu, T, et al. “Anti-obesity effects of artificial planting blueberry (Vaccinium ashei) anthocyanin in high-fat diet-treated mice.” International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2016, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26899872.

Building Blocks for **Better Health**

Our environment can help shape our health. When we take care to live properly, our chosen environment can help us to be healthier and enhance our wellbeing.





At least, that is how a concept in the design world called “wellness architecture” (sometimes referred to as biophilic design or enlightened design) is changing the conversation on how we interact with being inside. The concept purports that it’s not just what we put in our bodies that affects our wellbeing but also what we surround ourselves with. Wellness architecture focuses on several key areas, including air, water, light, fitness, comfort and mental health.

The focus of lighting in wellness architecture, for example, respects our natural, daily cycles by attempting to mimic the circadian rhythm.



During the day, brighter lightbulbs are used to illuminate and awaken our senses.

In the late afternoon and early evening, more glowing and softer lights are utilized to bring the feeling of the setting sun. The blue part of the light spectrum is also emphasized early in the day, as it is stimulating, and the red end of the spectrum is emphasized in the evening since blue light has been shown to decrease secretion of melatonin, the hormone that rules our sleep. Ordinary TV, computer and phone screens emit blue light, but there are now software programs that eliminate this part of the spectrum from screens in the evening hours.

At the office, windows are utilized and placed in specific places to capture as much natural light as possible. Beyond that, those windows are strategically designed to enhance shadows and capture the movement of the sun. Studies have demonstrated that we heal from illness at a faster rate when we are exposed to more daylight and natural scenes.¹ Additionally, we are more productive and can achieve more.²

It may seem counterintuitive, but the more natural light you are exposed to during your waking hours, the better you sleep at night.

In one study, workers who did not have an office space near a window on average had less sleep each night than those who did.³ And by no small amount—those workers actually averaged 46 minutes less sleep a night than their window-sitting colleagues! Not only was it a quantifiable sleep amount, but also their sleep quality was poorer than the natural light-exposed coworkers. Added to that, this wasn’t an issue that only affected their workdays; the sleep-deficient workers also had less quantity and poorer quality sleep on the days they did not work. The study’s researchers didn’t know why that was the case, but speculated it may have to do with energy levels—the workers with natural light exposure may have had more energy on their days off to do things outside and be more active.

There are many creative ideas for utilizing the space you have to enhance light. One is to move your desk or workspace near a window. Or, if you have a multi-season room, perhaps consider spending some of the year out there when you work. For people who work in windowless spaces, consider a lamp that has a dimmable bulb, or better yet, one that has that and a programmable timer so the light settings change at set times. If all else fails, you can buy a sunlight lamp (sometimes called a SAD lamp because it is often used to treat seasonal affective disorder) to use year-round during the daytime.

Air and water are other principle elements those in the wellness architecture world bring into their design of buildings and spaces. Regarding water, everything from small, bubbling water fountains to large water art is used to connect people in these spaces to this important earth element. Bathrooms in public buildings can be enhanced with sinks and faucets that help water flow in a more natural way (think river or bubbling brook) versus just shooting out of the faucet in a massive spray.



¹ Ulrich, R.S. “View through a window may influence recovery from surgery.” Science (New York, N.Y.), U.S. National Library of Medicine, 27 Apr. 1984, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/6143402.

² Plympton, P.; Conway, S.; Epstein, K. “Daylighting in Schools: Improving Student Performance and Health at a Price Schools Can Afford: Preprint.” | National Technical Reports Library - NTIS, Aug. 2000, ntrl.ntis.gov/NTRL/dashboard/searchResults/titleDetail/DE00757089.xhtml.

³ Boubekri, M, et al. “Impact of windows and daylight exposure on overall health and sleep quality of office workers: a case-control pilot study.” Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine : JCSM : official publication of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 15 June 2014, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24932139.



For air, the focus is on the quality of the air. Some experts believe that indoor air quality is often worse than outside pollution. Wellness architecture puts an emphasis on air circulation and decreasing toxins in the indoor air. It also calls attention to the importance of materials that are more naturally made, such as glues, paints and preservatives that don't emit toxic gases.

Plants or specific air purifiers also can be used to naturally purify the air.

But even something as simple as a ceiling fan and an open window can help with stale air in a room.

Encouraging physical fitness is another focus of wellness architecture. We all are well aware of the global concern about the sedentary lifestyle that is the norm in developed countries. Public health experts have referred to it as "the new smoking" in terms of public concern (and action needed). But for the past few decades our society, as well as the architecture, has been constructed around convenience and, admittedly important, making movement accessible for all. However, nowadays people drive circles in a parking lot waiting for a closer parking space to open up instead of walking the extra hundred feet. But it is often difficult to add more movement into your everyday life in modern buildings. Have you ever entered a building and attempted to get to the second or third floor via stairs, but finally relented and just took the escalator or elevator?

Not surprisingly, wellness architecture works to make activity not only more available but also more inviting. Strategically positioning staircases is one way to encourage increased physical activity, but it also makes it more aesthetically appealing to walk up.



In other words, stairs and movement need to be not only easily accessible but also pleasing and enjoyable to walk up or around.

One study looked at participants' desire and willingness to use a staircase instead of an elevator when faced with an ugly, inconveniently located staircase versus a grand, gorgeous staircase that is just as easy to find as the elevator.⁴ Think of the last time you were at an office building or a hospital and you tried to avoid the elevator in favor of the stairs.

⁴ Bassett, D R, et al. "Architectural design and physical activity: an observational study of staircase and elevator use in different buildings." *Journal of Physical Activity & Health*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, May 2013, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22975419.

Most likely the stairs were hard to locate; were behind a heavy, steel door; the staircase itself was concrete blocks with horrible lighting; and it may have been dirty, dank or dark! While we try not to be superficial, this aesthetic subconsciously discourages use of stairs.

But it isn't just stairs versus escalators or elevators that is the issue. Often hallways are depressingly lit and painted in some drab, sterile beige. To combat this, some ideas in wellness architecture play on the curve and movement of nature. Rarely in nature do you see straight lines. Instead, think of trees, rivers and flowers. Think of the beautiful grain of exposed wood or the unpredictable beauty in the lines of marble or stone.

Hallways in wellness architecture are being designed with curves that meander like water. Often they're lit with natural light or artificial light inspired by nature. Many wellness architects focus on things like living walls, which are walls that are either plant-inspired or have engineered materials or paints that can absorb toxins.

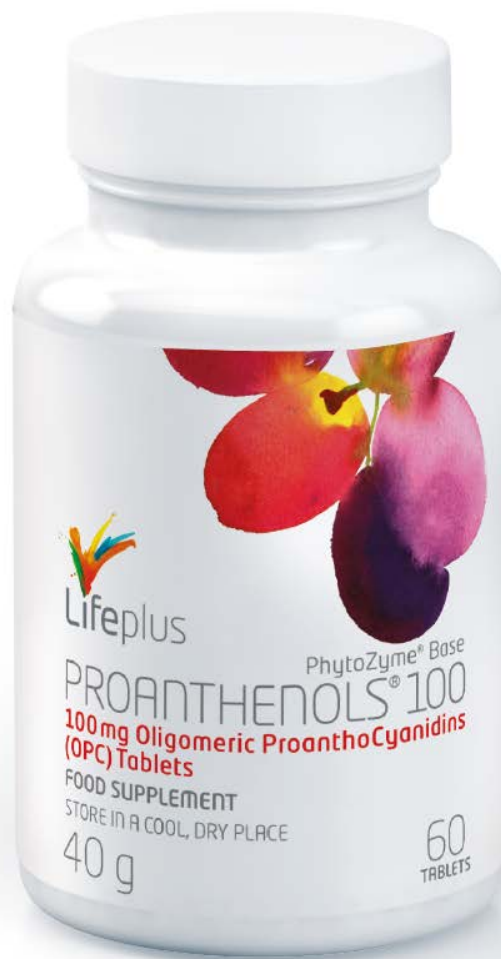
What can we do in our already built homes and workplaces to veer toward wellness? Declutter your space. Add hanging, floor and tabletop plants of varying textures and colors. Switch to a standing desk. Select natural textures and materials like wood and stone. Paint with calming, earth-inspired tones. Open windows for a fresh breeze. Choose curtains that are easy to use so you're more likely to actually fling them open in the morning! Whenever possible, bring the outdoors in.

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Turmeric

A very bright yellow-orange powder or a ginger-looking rhizome with an orange inside, turmeric is quickly becoming a household staple even in non-Indian kitchens. This rhizome (not a root, but rather a plant's underground stem) is showing up in Starbucks lattes, dietary supplements, herbal tea mixes, baked goods and even grocery store salad dressings. And no wonder it is becoming increasingly popular—the health benefits are impressive!

From antioxidant to anti-inflammatory properties, and from antimicrobial (antibacterial) to antifungal benefits, this traditional Indian spice contributes to boosting the body's immune system, helping people lose weight and keeping people feeling younger as they age.¹

In South Central Asia, Ayurvedic medicine has exalted the healing properties of turmeric for many centuries. Now, modern-day scientists recognize that much of turmeric's healthy characteristics can be attributed to curcumin, part of a group of phytonutrients called, similarly, curcuminoids. Curcumin gives the rhizome its distinguishing bright yellow-orange hue.

But the most key quality is that curcumin is scientifically proven to have powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidative properties.²

Inflammation contributes to so many ailments—from obesity and body aches to early aging and weakened immune systems. Arthritis is particularly helped by turmeric's role in dealing with inflammation. A meta-analysis of studies on turmeric as a treatment for arthritis and other inflammatory painful ailments showed that there was sufficient evidence to encourage concurrent use for treatment of the diseases.³

Turmeric is very supportive of digestive health and weight management. In India, turmeric has been traditionally utilized to treat stomach ulcers and gastrointestinal inflammation. Now researchers are finding that the curcumin in turmeric also aids in weight loss because it helps abate the growth of adipose, or fat, tissue in our bodies.⁴

When we drink a turmeric tea or tincture it helps our metabolism by preventing fat from amassing in our cells.

It also aids in improvements in digestion by helping our bodies produce bile. Furthermore, turmeric helps decrease blood sugar, which can help those combating diabetes.⁵

Turmeric is a superfood that possesses antibacterial, antiviral and antimicrobial properties. In fact, one study demonstrated impressive evidence of the use of turmeric in warding off specific viruses.⁶ A multistudy review revealed that turmeric has been successful as a component of therapies to treat some bacterial infections, such as *Helicobacter pylori*, the bacteria involved in stomach ulcers. Additionally, it possesses fungicidal effects, specifically in helping to treat *Candida* (yeast) species.⁷

Due to the curcumin in turmeric, it is effective in fighting off free radical attacks on our bodies. A warm turmeric tincture or tea can therefore help slow down the aging process! Even more profoundly, in addition to the free radical and antioxidant benefits, studies have shown that it works to help restore your DNA and heal existing DNA damage.⁸

Because positivity and the mind-body connection is so essential in health and aging, mood balance and mental health are integral components of living a full and vivacious life. A study done by top universities in China also demonstrated the antidepressant and mood-regulation properties of turmeric.⁹

You can incorporate turmeric into your everyday diet by adding the powder to hot tea or a fruit smoothie. Its bioavailability is better when consumed warm, with some healthy fat, and with black pepper—think a spoonful of coconut oil in that smoothie or perhaps a swirl of full-fat milk in that tea. Other ways to increase your consumption of turmeric is to melt it in with butter to drizzle on top of your vegetables, sprinkle the powder into scrambled eggs, grate it fresh on top of a salad or slaw, or mix it into honey with ginger and black pepper for a medicinal sweetener. And of course, there is the traditional use in curries (in fact, some curry blends already have a fair amount of turmeric in them).

¹ Prasad S, Aggarwal B B. Turmeric, the Golden Spice: From Traditional Medicine to Modern Medicine. In: Benzie IFF, Wachtel-Galor S, editors. Herbal Medicine: Biomolecular and Clinical Aspects, 2nd edition. Boca Raton (FL): CRC Press/Taylor & Francis; 2011. Chapter 13.

² Aggarwal, B B, et al. "Curcumin: the Indian solid gold." Advances in experimental medicine and biology, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2007, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17569205.

³ Daily, James W., et al. "Efficacy of Turmeric Extracts and Curcumin for Alleviating the Symptoms of Joint Arthritis: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Clinical Trials." Journal of Medicinal Food, Mary Ann Liebert, Inc.,

¹ Aug. 2016, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5003001/.

⁴ Ejaz, A, et al. "Curcumin inhibits adipogenesis in 3T3-L1 adipocytes and angiogenesis and obesity in C57/BL mice." The Journal of Nutrition, U.S. National Library of Medicine, May 2009, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19297423.

⁵ Nabavi, S F, et al. "Curcumin: a natural product for diabetes and its complications." Current topics in medicinal chemistry, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2015, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26088351.

⁶ Narayanan, A, et al. "Curcumin inhibits Rift Valley fever virus replication in human cells." The Journal of Biological Chemistry, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 28 Sept. 2012, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22847000.

⁷ Moghadamtousi, Soheil Zorofchian, et al. "A Review on Antibacterial, Antiviral, and Antifungal Activity of Curcumin." BioMed Research International, Hindawi Publishing Corporation, Apr. 2014, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4022204/.

⁸ Krishnaswamy, K. "Traditional Indian spices and their health significance." Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2008, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18296352.

⁹ Liu, Chia-Yu, et al. "Antidepressant-like activity of turmerone in behavioral despair tests in mice." BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine, BioMed Central, 1 Nov. 2013, bmccomplementalternmed.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6882-13-299.

Digital Detox—How Unplugging to Recharge and Reconnect Supports Our Health and Sanity

“IRL” is a common acronym on the internet that means “in real life.” It refers to things that occur offline, person-to-person, and it connotes that life online is not fully real.

We all need to disconnect in order to connect, be that with ourselves for some much-needed personal time or with others in a more intentional way. But why is it important and what does it look like to actually do it?

Better posture

Looking down at your smartphone is like carrying a literal weight on your back. According to a study analyzing the physics behind cell phone usage and posture, the common stance we hold when looking at our cell phones is equivalent to putting 60 pounds of pressure on our neck.¹

More physically active

Not surprisingly, study after study shows that less technology leads to more physical activity.² When we turn off the movie we’re watching or put down our texting conversation and instead opt to go outside, we are more likely to move different parts of our bodies. Even if it is going to the grocery store or pottering around the yard, there is more movement than just our thumb swiping up and down on a screen.

Improved sleep

All light after sunset is essentially unnatural. While it might be an unrealistic stretch to turn off all lighting devices at sunset, limiting our digital device usage after dinner or a couple hours before bed is good for our sleep. One study showed that men in particular experience disturbed sleep with digital device exposure.³

These devices emit something called blue light, which prevents the release of melatonin, an intrinsically created hormone that promotes sleep. One study took a group of participants to a camp in the mountains for one week, during which time they had no access to electronic devices. They were only exposed to natural light. This study showed that their circadian clocks synchronized with the rising and setting sun.⁴

Human interaction

Give loved ones your undivided attention. Remember when smartphones first came out? Back then we felt it was rude when we spoke to someone and they kept their eyes fixated on their phone. Nowadays it is normal to go to lectures, be in meetings or go out to dinner and see the glow of smartphones reflecting off people’s faces as they sit in silence or half-listening to those who are talking. But being disconnected to technology can make you wittier and more creative in a social situation. Conversation becomes more spontaneous and creative. Instead of someone in a group posing a question (e.g., who was the lead singer of that one band?) and friends immediately Googling the answer, funny guesses abound, or witty, albeit incorrect, responses are laughed at aloud.

Turning off technology shows people we are present in their humanity.

Decrease stress

Not surprisingly, overuse of technology increases our stress levels.⁵ And often it is a stress level we don’t even recognize. Less than a quarter of those surveyed in the United States report technology as a stressor in their lives. Yet science shows that cortisol levels in our saliva increase with smartphone usage.⁶ Similarly, the aforementioned issues—less quality sleep, decreased meaningful social interactions, physical inactivity and bodily stress—are enough individually, let alone collectively, to cause significant stress.



¹ Hansraj, K.K. “Assessment of stresses in the cervical spine caused by posture and position of the head.” Surgical technology international, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Nov. 2014, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25393825.

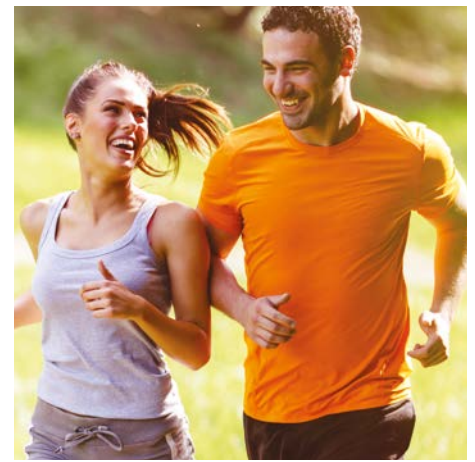
² Vandelandotte, C, et al. “Associations of leisure-time internet and computer use with overweight and obesity, physical activity and sedentary behaviors: cross-sectional study.” Journal of Medical Internet Research, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 27 July 2009, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19666455.

³ Thomée, Sara. “ICT use and mental health in young adults. Effects of computer and mobile phone use on stress, sleep

disturbances, and symptoms of depression.” GUPEA, 1 Mar. 2012, gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/28245.

⁴ Wright, J.R, et al. “Entrainment of the human circadian clock to the natural light-dark cycle.” Current biology : CB, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 19 Aug. 2013, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23910656.

⁵ Thomée, S, et al. “Computer use and stress, sleep disturbances, and symptoms of depression among young adults—a prospective cohort study.” BMC psychiatry, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 22 Oct. 2012, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23088719.



But how do you do it? Unplugging can be daunting because we are so conditioned to turn to the internet for answers and entertainment. There are daily small steps you can take, such as don't look at your phone or open your laptop until after you've gotten up, stretched and taken a shower.

Consider never having your phone with you during meals—even meals you eat alone! Leave your phone at home when out with friends or on a date with your partner.

For a more intense detox, consider going on a long hike once a month and not bringing your phone (or leave it in the car). Perhaps have a device-free day once a month (or be even more brave, weekly), during which you go phone-, laptop- and TV-free for a full 24 hours. These aren't going to be effortless, and sometimes they won't even feel good in the moment; but focusing on how good it is for you and your relationship connections will ultimately be what is sown.

⁶ Choi, S, et al. "Real-time measurement of human salivary cortisol for the assessment of psychological stress using a smartphone." *Sensing and Bio-Sensing Research*, Elsevier, Dec. 2014, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S221418041400021X#s0040.



Dealing with Osteoporosis Naturally

Osteoporosis is the weakening of your bones—“osteo” means “bone,” and “-poros” means “passage” or “pore.” Think about how Swiss cheese or a natural sponge looks with their crevices and holes.

Osteoporosis occurs when we lose more bone mass than what is rebuilt naturally by our bodies. In other words, there are more holes (or pores) in the Swiss cheese or sponge.

Bone health is something that is essential to focus on throughout life. Think of your bones as a retirement savings account.

When you are young, it is important to put a lot of effort into your bone health.

Osteoporosis is caused by many factors. Lack of basic nutrients—such as calcium, vitamins D and K (especially vitamin K2), and magnesium—accounts for many of these nutrient factors. Trace minerals such as copper, zinc, manganese, boron and silicon, which are often missing in diets of processed foods, also contribute to osteoporosis when there aren't enough in your diet. Lifestyle habits like excessive alcohol drinking, smoking and inactivity are also factors, as are certain prescription medications such as corticosteroids and some cancer treatments that block basic hormones such as estrogen or testosterone, which have important effects in keeping bones strong.

Because of the role that estrogen plays in bone health, postmenopausal women are at greater risk for the complications of the condition. That said, men also must focus on bone health as they too age and suffer from osteoporosis. While women experience a rush of bone loss during the menopausal period, it eventually becomes about equal to that of men.¹

¹ Gennari, C. “Calcium and vitamin D nutrition and bone disease of the elderly.” Public health nutrition, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Apr. 2001, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11683549.

² Sunyecz, John A. “The use of calcium and vitamin D in the management of osteoporosis.” Therapeutics and Clinical Risk Management, Dove Medical Press, Aug. 2008,

But what can we do if we are already in our senior years?

Eat a balanced diet. The foundation of so much health advice is an important building block for bone health.

When you eat plenty of vegetables (all manner of leafy greens) and consume healthy dairy, you are obtaining your nutrients from natural sources.

And what nutrients are we most focused on for bone health? When we think of osteoporosis we may immediately think of calcium! And with good reason—calcium is one of the most pivotal. Calcium helps your body build and maintain your bones. If you aren't consuming at least three servings of calcium-rich foods every day, it is important to take a calcium supplement, particularly if you are at-risk or have already been diagnosed with osteoporosis.

But calcium couldn't do it without vitamin D. Vitamin D helps your body absorb the calcium. Vitamin D is actually a hormone that our bodies make when our skin is exposed to sunlight. Generally speaking, only about 10 percent of our vitamin D comes from food. That said, people who live in more northern latitudes or less sunny places, or people who don't spend a lot of time outside, should consider taking a vitamin D supplement.²

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2621390/.

³ Higgs, J, et al. “Nutrition and osteoporosis prevention for the orthopaedic surgeon: A wholefoods approach.” EFORT open reviews., U.S. National Library of Medicine, 23 June 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28736622.

⁴ Welch, A A, et al. “Dietary Magnesium May Be Protective for Aging of Bone and Skeletal Muscle in Middle and Younger Older Age Men and Women: Cross-Sectional Findings from the UK Biobank Cohort.” Nutrients, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 30 Oct. 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29084183.

⁵ Han, L, et al. “Effects of weight training time on bone mineral density of patients with secondary osteoporosis after

There are also lesser known bone-building nutrients to help with osteoporosis. Vitamin K and magnesium are as essential as calcium for bone health. Vitamin K is most abundant in leafy greens.³ Magnesium is plentiful in lentils, tofu, almonds, broccoli and spinach.⁴ You may be seeing some repetition here—many of these foods are good sources of calcium too.

Get plenty of exercise. While nutrition plays an enormous part in bone health, weight-bearing exercises are necessary to prevent and combat osteoporosis.⁵

Flexibility and strength training exercises help us keep our balance, which wards off falls that can be especially damaging to brittle bones.

Aim to walk, do gentle squats or leg lunges, or even do some weight-lifting exercises. Yoga is an excellent choice because it builds strength without putting too much pressure on our joints.

Decrease stress. Negative stress hurts our bodies in many ways, but a leading contributing element is that our endocrine system (the body system that has to do most with our hormones) releases cortisol. Cortisol is colloquially known as the stress hormone, and it's harmful to our bone health.⁶ Because of this, it's important to maintain or establish a self-care regimen that is nurturing to not just your mental and emotional health, but that also will ultimately benefit your physical health.

hemiplegia.” Experimental and therapeutic medicine, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Mar. 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28450926.

⁶ Chiodini, I, and A Scillitani. “Role of cortisol hypersecretion in the pathogenesis of osteoporosis.” Recent progress in medicina, U.S. National Library of Medicine, June 2008, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18710063.



Fostering Focus

When we think of children, we most often think of them running around the playground with all the gusto in the world. We think of our own children or grandchildren as they play for hours, talking and animating, expressing all that is in their vivid imaginations.

While all children can and do have intense moments of focus and concentration, we don't often associate children with calmness or meditation. Some children are born with an inner focus, while others are more outwardly interactive and boisterous.

Children are like little scientists—fascinated with the world and taking in how things look and function. They are fully capable of focusing on things that they enjoy and find fascinating.



Have you ever watched a toddler examine a new toy tool with incredible intensity?

Focus and concentration help children learn and develop, and that gives them self-confidence and a healthy sense of self.

Focus is comparable to mindfulness for adults. It is something that needs to be nurtured and practiced. Mindfulness and focus have tremendous physical and mental health benefits, including increased feelings of joy, better academic performance and decreased feelings of stress.

Here are some ideas to help foster focus.

Time and space. Children need them both. We cannot expect our three-year-old to get dressed and be out the door in the same amount of time we can accomplish such a task. Make sure that your expectations are within your children's developmental limits based on their age. Sometimes what adults think of as lack of focus is actually completely appropriate for a child. Experts agree that young children can only focus between five and 15 minutes contingent on the activity at hand—they can focus for less time on challenging activities compared with a task they enjoy or that is familiar to them.

Minimize multitasking. Do one thing at a time. Children today are bombarded with screens, flashing lights on toys and noisemakers, and a society expects multitasking from a very early start. The trouble is that our modern adult life demands—and even exalts—multitasking as an admirable quality. Not to mention the fact that research shows us that it reduces concentration and hinders our outcomes. Because children learn so much from observing what we do, it is imperative to see how our time and focus are pulled in many different directions. Are we modeling for them what focus looks like? Another way to work on this is creating intentional time and space for tasks such as homework. Or try breaking down larger activities into step-by-step segments.



For example, when learning to tie their shoes, have them first just cross the laces and you do the rest until they've mastered the first step.



Later, move on to loop one of the laces under the other, and so on and so forth. Limiting activities to one thing at a time or breaking activities down into smaller steps helps children (and adults) feel less overwhelmed, and then attention can be placed on the small victories and accomplishments that result from focusing on the more achievable task.

Recess for energy release. Perhaps our concerns surrounding children and focus are because we are demanding too much of our children without giving them a proper release. Once again, our neighbors in Scandinavia have a unique approach that seems to be working well.

In Finland, public school children learn, study and have structured instruction for 45 minutes and then are given 15 minutes to blow off steam during their recess.¹

(A bonus is that while they go out and play, the adults retreat for their break at the same time—taking turns throughout the day to supervise the children at play). The students follow this cycle throughout their school day, and it has remarkable results. Teachers note the children are more attentive during the beginning of that learning cycle and less engaged toward the end of the 45-minute lesson. But it isn't just for Finnish children. Studies conducted with this approach in North America and the United Kingdom resulted in similar positive outcomes.²

Students demonstrated improved cognitive performance and adjusted to the school setting better. Since the institution of this system in the Finnish public schools, prescriptions for stimulant medications such as methylphenidate to treat ADD and ADHD have also fallen dramatically.

Inhale. Exhale. Slow, deep-belly breathing slows down our monkey minds that are constantly jumping from one thought to the next. Teach and encourage this practiced skill with your children and then see if it works to help them focus before a task they aren't excited about. It calms their anxiety and helps them be present in the given moment.

¹ Walker, Timothy D. "How Finland Keeps Kids Focused Through Free Play." The Atlantic, Atlantic Media Company, 30 June 2014. www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/06/how-finland-keeps-kids-focused/373544/.

² "The Role of Recess in Children's Cognitive Performance and School Adjustment." Educational Researcher, Jan. 2005. journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0013189X034001013?journalCode=edra.

Healthy Inside and Out

The adage that beauty comes from within is currently manifesting as a shift in the cosmetic, hair care and skin care industries. It's no wonder this is changing as many women across the world are rightfully equating wellness and healthy living to the concept of what is beautiful.

Gone are the days of beauty being a singular body type or a specific, enhanced physical feature. Instead, more women are embracing beauty as a multifactorial concept, with wellness at its nucleus.

This progress may have come from the health and wellness spas of larger global cities and those services becoming increasingly popular in more provincial areas. There also is some global inspiration from places like China, where acupuncture—the essence of wellness there—is commonly utilized for beauty treatments.

Concepts such as nurturing your inner spirit, understanding your energy cycles and decreasing stress are becoming common in beauty routines. Not to mention the large emphasis—and now the acceptance and embracement within the cosmetic and beauty industry—on inner beauty. Whereas before the beauty industry would sell consumers the hope for beauty in a jar, now they recognize that consumers want a more holistic health approach.

Currently popular ideas such as ensuring your skin is healthy instead of covering up unhealthy skin with makeup, or taking supplements with biotin and methylsulfonylmethane (MSM) to ensure hair health, are becoming the norm.

Similarly, instead of a focus on being skinny or thinness, women are opting for body image preferences that lean more toward fit and toned. Women are beginning to believe that beauty is the offspring of wellness and health.

Intuitively we know that wellness and beauty are intricately linked. For women, aspiring to beauty is often a key motivator in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. To put it bluntly, vanity can move us into *wanting* to take healthy action, although it doesn't always move us into that healthy action.¹ But seeing beauty, health and wellness as important values in our lives is far from narcissism. We don't just see beauty visually—we feel, hear and sense beauty. It is so much more complex than just a physical attribute. Winston Churchill famously referred to vanity as “that vice that promotes so many virtues.”

One study analyzed how the desire for the appearance of healthier skin was a key motivating factor for increasing the consumption of vegetables and fruits.²

Another study had participants look at images of people with sun-related aging as a motivating factor for better sunscreen usage compliance.³ The study highlighted that the participants were less motivated by the discussion on the prevention of skin cancer than they were vanity!

But there is a fine line between utilizing the desire for beauty as a health motivational tool and the quest for beauty turning into a shaming mechanism. It's important to be realistic. When looking at celebrities or even quasi-famous internet personalities as inspiration, we need to begin with where we are first (not where that celebrity or YouTube host is at).

¹ Pan, W, and J Peña. “The Exposure Effects of Online Model Pictures and Weight-Related Persuasive Messages on Women's Weight-Loss Planned Behaviors.” *Journal of Health Communication*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Oct. 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29020539.

² Whitehead, R D, et al. “A randomized controlled trial of an appearance-based dietary intervention.” *Health psychology : official journal of the Division of Health Psychology*, American Psychological Association, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Jan. 2014, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23527517.



A newer term, “fitspiration,” refers to the tendency for ordinary people to look to others—mainly internet sources—for motivation in fitness goals.⁴

Often looking at posts on Instagram, videos on YouTube or pins on Pinterest can give us ideas for health and beauty; but there is a fine line if they are also making us feel inadequate or if the goals these online personalities are portraying are unattainable.

³ Tuong, W, and A W Armstrong. “Effect of appearance-based education compared with health-based education on sunscreen use and knowledge: a randomized controlled trial.” *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Apr. 2014, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24508292.

⁴ Simpson, C C, and S E Mazzeo. “Skinny Is Not Enough: A Content Analysis of Fitspiration on Pinterest.” *Health communication*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, May 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27326747.



Perhaps the bimodal approach of utilizing both beauty and health to inspire is the appropriate medium. Researchers looked at smoking cessation through the double lenses of both oral health and physical attractiveness of smokers.⁵

It found that the two-pronged approach of combining health and beauty were quite motivating in getting the subjects to want to quit smoking.



Finding one or two bloggers or Instagrammers you feel are most aligned with your beauty values and health objectives may be a useful source of inspiration. Make sure they have something that you feel is achievable and realistic for you. Seeing others live into their beauty and health is motivating when we feel we can also achieve similar goals.

⁵ Semer, N, et al. "Development and evaluation of a tobacco cessation motivational program for adolescents based on physical attractiveness and oral health." Journal of dental hygiene : JDH, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2005, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16297311.

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Ask the Expert

Does fat or sugar make me fat?

It's no coincidence that waistlines have been expanding since the war on fat started. The old (and outdated) theory was that if you eat fat, your body will store that fat. While it is true that eating too much fat for the amount of energy you expend can lead to weight gain (like any other food), many people these days are actually eating too little fat and missing out on the benefits of a healthy, balanced diet.

It's a fact that your body requires fat to function at optimum levels.

Fish, avocados, olive oil, coconut oil, safflower and flax oils, and organic cheeses and nuts are all excellent foods to increase your healthy fat intake. However, it's important to remember to never heat oils that are liquid at room temperature—for cooking, use only coconut oil, butter, ghee (clarified butter) or rendered animal fat—only saturated fats can safely be heated without causing oxidative stress and inflammation, and you should only consume saturated fat if you have an active lifestyle that will burn that fat for fuel. Many people cook with olive oil, but this is a mistake, as it, like any oil that is liquid at room temperature (unsaturated fatty acid containing oils) will oxidize rapidly when heated.



Back to the war on fat and how it has led to widespread weight gain: When manufacturers began removing fat from their products, they had to increase flavor with something else. Often, this meant more sugar. Now we find sugar in its many forms in all manner of foods. It is this high sugar content that is often responsible for weight problems (especially when sugar is combined with fat). Also, the addition of salt makes for a highly addictive trio (sugar + fat + salt), which you will find well represented in “junk foods.” If you are looking to control your weight, put down the low-fat products and eat a diet rich in whole foods and low in refined carbohydrates and sugars, and stay physically active throughout your life.

What is a vision board?

A vision board is a tool people use to help focus their mind on the things they want in life. The definition is loose because the end result is so personal. Your vision board could be a collage of pictures cut from magazines. Or it could be a chalkboard filled with positive affirmations. It could even be the wallpaper on your computer. Whatever medium and messages you choose to illustrate, your vision board should be filled with messages that you want to achieve. When it comes to living the healthy, happy life you want, visualization is one of the most powerful mind exercises you can do. A vision board simply helps you focus; it puts the images and words that you want to focus on right in front of you, where you will see it multiple times a day. Continuously being reminded of the positive things and experiences you want in life will help you stay focused on attaining those goals. To further help align your thoughts with the positive aspects of your life, you can also add trinkets and mementos from wonderful experiences you have already had. Ticket stubs from an airline on your last great vacation, for example. Or a pressed flower that reminds you of the beauty of nature.

What exactly is self-care, and how do I practice it?

Self-care is a blanket term that includes any practice or habit you do to take care of your mental, physical and spiritual health. Self-care is important because many of us live extremely busy, modern lives in which we focus all our energy on accomplishing tasks. Self-care shouldn't be a task but rather a regular practice that makes you feel good. Self-care can mean taking time out of your busy week for an hour-long massage. Or it could mean going to bed a half hour early in order to relax with a calming book while your body begins to fall asleep. Self-care can even mean spending time with a positive-thinking friend who makes you feel good about yourself. There are no right or wrong self-care activities as long as they leave you feeling better. Again, this could mean better physically, mentally or spiritually. After a busy week of taking care of work and family duties, we could all use a little self-care to keep ourselves energized and focused on the positive aspects of our lives.



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