

Keeping It All Together

"Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." ~Michael Pollan

This is where you have to be conscious of what goes in your body, what activities are too much for you, and what your thoughts are. To keep it all together, to ensure your fatigue, pain, or illness does not return it is work. I've has a patients ask me when will they ever be done working on themselves? My answer – not this life time!

Healthy Foods

A healthy diet consists of low-glycemic carbohydrates in the form of fruits and vegetables, healthy fats, and clean protein sources.

The three simple steps for a healthy diet are:

1. Get rid of refined sugars and grains from your diet

Excessive consumption of sugar has been linked to leaky gut, chronic fatigue, obesity, insulin resistance, diabetes, ADHD, heart disease, and cancers. However, not all carbs are unhealthy. Low-glycemic carbohydrates in the forms of fruits and vegetables have high amounts of fiber, enzymes, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that detoxify your cells and boost energy and health.

2. Replace unhealthy fats with healthy fats

Unhealthy fats such as trans fats from partially hydrogenated oil and saturated fats can contribute to chronic fatigue, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Good fats including unrefined vegetable oils (such as olive, avocado, flax and coconut oils), nuts, seeds, and fish are essential for production of hormones and development of the brain. They may also help to fight inflammation and boost cellular healing.

3. Replace unhealthy proteins with healthy proteins

Hundreds of studies link the consumption of commercial meats with obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancers, neurological disorders, and chronic illness. In addition, these meats also contain antibiotics, hormones, pesticides, and herbicides.

Grass-fed and free-range meats, and wild-caught fish are safer. However, proteins from plant sources such as lentils, beans, green peas, quinoa, and amaranth are also great!

Six benefits of a healthy diet

- provides optimum nutrients
- reduces blood glucose
- decreases inflammation
- eliminates toxins
- heals the gut
- alkalizes the bodyⁱ

Supplements

"Food is food, medicine is medicine, and both of them are really amazing." ~Dylan MacKay, Ph.D.

Most people in the United States take one or more dietary supplements either every day or occasionally. Dietary supplements include vitamins, minerals, protomorphogens, herbals and botanicals, amino acids, enzymes, and many other products. The most popular supplements include multivitamins especially vitamin B complex (make sure it's methylated if you have the MTHFR gene defect), vitamin D, and vitamin E, calcium, iron, probiotics, protein powders, omega-3 fish oils, glucosamine, turmeric, echinacea, and garlic.

The use of supplements is controversial. Many health professionals argue that supplements are unnecessary because we can get the essential nutrients we need from our diets alone. I have found that our food quality today just doesn't contain enough nutrients because of poor soil quality, GMO foods, pesticides, herbicides, and so on. Supplements help you to get adequate amounts of essential nutrients that may not be available in your diet, assuming your gut lining is in balance and you can absorb them properly. I do agree supplements can't replace the wide variety of foods in a healthy diet. Also, there is no consensus on the best supplements for overall health.ⁱⁱ Your needs are as individualized as you are, and ever-changing.

Choosing the supplements that are right for you depend on your age, gender, diet, health status, genetics, and physical activity. For example, people who don't have enough exposure to sunlight may need more vitamin D. Vegetarians or vegans may need additional vitamin B12. Supplements should enhance and complement a balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle.ⁱⁱⁱ

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not determine whether dietary supplements are effective before they are marketed. A supplement may not be safe just because it has a "natural" label. A supplement's safety depends on its chemical composition, how it is prepared, how it was stored, how it works in the body, and

its dose. For example, herbs like comfrey and kava can harm the liver. So please, don't take any dietary supplement without consulting your health care provider.^{iv}

Clean water

"There's a very fundamental basic value system that I think America was built upon, and that's mutual respect, honor, integrity and concern for our environment and the right to clean water. And we have moved away from it." ~Erin Brockovich

Unfortunately, our tap water contains harmful substances like dangerous chemicals, compounds, and metals. A three-year study conducted by the Environmental Working Group throughout the country in 2009 found 316 chemicals in tap water.^v Being from Flint, Michigan originally, I know firsthand about the Flint water crisis being contaminated with lead. Yes, that is an extreme toxicity but there are many chemicals found in our tap water that do more harm than good. For example, fluoride is a huge problem in the water supply of many cities. Fluoride negatively affects the thyroid causing it to shut down hormone production.

Contrary to popular belief, bottled water is not safe either. According to the National Resources Defense Council, 22 percent of the brands they tested contained contaminant levels above state health limits. Also, at least 25 percent of bottled water is just plain tap water.^{vi} In addition, chemicals like Bisphenol A leach from the plastic bottles into the water causing hormone disruptions.

So, what is one to do? The safest option is to use a water filter at home such as a gravity filter that includes filtering out fluoride like Berkey or Propur, or reverse osmosis filters. They use a semi-permeable membrane that can trap any molecule larger than water.^{vii} I promise you will save so much money with a gravity filter versus buying bottled water, and you'll help save the environment as well!

How much water should you drink every day to prevent dehydration? The answer is to drink about 50% of your body weight in ounces of water daily. If you weigh 140 pounds, drink about 70 ounces of water a day (about 2 liters). Additional ways to stay hydrated include eating more fruits and vegetables, using natural sea salt, and exercising regularly.^{viii} Movement improves circulation and overall electrolyte levels.^{ix}

Exercise

"If you only have time to exercise or meditate but not both, then make exercise your daily meditation." ~Steve Pavlina

Exercise is a natural way to relax, clear your mind, rejuvenate your body and helps to protect against the physical effects of daily stress. The benefits of regular exercise include:

- increases strength, flexibility and endurance
- strengthens bones and protects against osteoporosis
- reduces risk of heart disease^x
- improves sleep^{xi}
- improves memory
- boosts energy and reduces fatigue^{xii}
- increases mood and self-confidence^{xiii}
- improves work performance
- improves immunity^{xiv}
- improves quality of life and lifespan^{xv}
- boosts happiness levels

Movement

"Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it." ~Plato

You may have heard that *sitting is the new smoking*. And most Americans have a sedentary job. Excessive sitting may shorten your lifespan—even if you go to the gym regularly!^{xvi} Paradoxically, increased movement helps to reduce the symptoms of fatigue and brain fog.

We need to move more and make movement a part of our lifestyle—whether it's walking, gardening, dancing, sports or taking the stairs instead of the elevator. One way to be more active is to exercise while watching TV. However, if you have been inactive for a while, consult your doctor before you start exercising.

Walking is a great place to start. If you are suffering with fatigue or pain, do not over do it. Start low and slow. Just walking 15-20 minutes a day is perfect. A rule of thumb is that if you are more fatigued after a workout, then it was too much. You have stressed your adrenal glands. You want to have a boost of energy after a workout. Ride those endorphins! If it's exhausting, it's too much stress on your body, for now.

Flow Yoga, Tai Chi, and Pilates are gentle forms of movement that are adaptable to any age and fitness level. Going to a regular class will help with accountability and building community, but you can also just pull up a YouTube video and get started now.

Bodyweight exercises can be done in your office or home without any equipment. —all you need is your body. There are many varieties of these exercises and they can be adapted to any fitness level. Check out this article: *101 Bodyweight Exercises That You Can Do Anywhere* (<http://travelstrong.net/bodyweight-exercises/#>).

Rebounders are mini-trampolines on which you can bounce or jog. Rebounding improves your physical fitness and also improves your lymphatic drainage, immune system, and bone strength. You can place it in your office or outdoors or in front of your TV. It's a great way for the family to exercise together.

Fitness trackers help to record and monitor your daily activity. Depending on your present level of fitness, you can set a daily goal of 1,000 steps or fewer and gradually increase it until you do 7,000 to 10,000 steps daily.

Fitness apps: There are some great fitness apps available today, and many are free. ^{xvii}

Charity Miles (<https://charitymiles.org/>) is a free app that donates money to the charity of your choice when you use it to log your running, walking or bicycling miles. For every mile you log, you help to earn money for your chosen charity. Corporate sponsors agree to donate a few cents for every mile you complete, and in exchange, they show you special offers in the app or otherwise expose you to their brands. The Charity Miles app lets anyone earn a little bit of money for a charity of their choice. It's available for both android and iOS.

Spiritual practice – meditation

"Meditation: It's not what you think." ~Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn

It is often said that meditation is to the mind what physical exercise is to the body. In fact, both exercise and meditation are beneficial for both mind and body.

Meditation means different things to different people. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, meditation means to engage in a specific mental exercise or to focus one's thoughts on a specific object (such as concentration on one's breathing).^{xviii}

Hundreds of clinical studies and trials have proved that meditation improves quality of life in various ways^{xix}:

- improves sleep quality
- improves response to chronic pain
- lowers inflammation
- boosts the immune system
- reduces headaches
- reduces overeating and risk of obesity
- helps people deal with chronic illnesses
- helps in mental disorders like eating disorders and bipolar disorder
- helps to deal with anxiety and depression
- lowers cortisol and stress levels
- helps with learning disabilities like ADHD and ADD
- improves decision-making and communication
- improves memory, focus, and mental clarity
- boosts effectiveness and efficiency at work
- increases positive feelings such as compassion, equanimity, happiness, and empathy^{xx}

Meditation has been used for centuries to heal both the body and mind in all religions and traditions. Like exercise, meditation can be done at home and even a few minutes of practice daily can be beneficial in several ways. Follow these tips to start your meditation practice:

- **Fix the time and place for your daily meditation:** Preferably first thing in the morning for a few minutes and a few minutes just before sleeping. Start small – set a timer of just 2-5 minutes and then gradually increase the time once you get used to this routine. Set a timer and sit until it goes off.
- **Use the right posture:** Initially, you can sit on a chair in an erect posture with your back straight but relaxed and eyes closed.
- **Give importance to the process, not the result:** During meditation, try to maintain a relaxed focus. One effective way to do this is by experiencing the incoming and outgoing breath. When the mind wanders, as it will, sooner or later, smile and gently bring your attention back to your breath. And again. The goal is equanimity, not stillness of the mind (which is going to take a while). Gradually, you will learn to be aware of the reality of the present moment without any judgment or negative reaction.

Here's an exercise - For really active minds, I recommend a counting meditation. Take a deep breath in and hold it for the count of one, then let it out. Take another breath in and hold it for the count of two. Breathe in again and hold it for the count of three. Increase progressively and try to hold your breath up to a count of ten. If your mind starts to wander or you start thinking about the grocery list, start back over at one.

If you need support to start or maintain your meditation practice, check out the following sites:

- Ten Percent Happier: <https://www.tenpercent.com/>
- Calm: <https://www.calm.com/>
- Headspace: <https://www.headspace.com/>
- InsightTimer: <https://insighttimer.com/>

Annual labs with a functional practitioner

Has your primary care doctor told you, “All your blood tests look normal? Or, “keep on doing what you’re doing?” And have they said this in spite of your physical, mental or emotional complaints? If you keep on doing what you’re doing, there is a chance that eventually even your basic labs will become abnormal!

Unfortunately, the current medical system does not focus on the prevention of disease. Primary care doctors often do not discuss lifestyle habits with their patients or prescribe extensive labs that can detect underlying dysfunction early enough to prevent serious illness. On the other hand, functional practitioners are more focused on detecting the early signs of dysfunction and preventing them before they become too serious.

The five types of blood tests you should do every year are:^{xxi}:

1. Complete Blood Count and Complete Metabolic Panel

These two blood tests give information about your blood cell values, kidney function, liver function, and electrolyte and hydration status.

2. Metabolic Markers: Fasting glucose, hemoglobin A1c, and lipid panel

These metabolic markers help us to understand how you are processing macronutrients in the diet. Elevations in any of these levels can increase your risk for diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer’s disease. Even if your Hba1c is in the normal range, every increase by 0.1 will increase the rate at which your brain shrinks in size per year.^{xxii} Therefore, it is important to reach the optimal range, instead of staying in the normal range.

3. Essential Nutrients: iron/ferritin, vitamin D, vitamin B12, magnesium

Many people have deficiency of vitamin D, vitamin B12, iron, and magnesium, so they should be checked at least once a year. Again, it’s important to consider their optimal range instead of the normal range. For example, the normal range of vitamin D may be from 30-100 nmol/L but the optimal range is 60-100 nmol/L.^{xxiii}

4. Broad Thyroid Panel

In most primary care clinics, only 1 or 2 thyroid markers are checked, usually TSH and/or total T4. Six additional thyroid-related values need to be done: Total T3, Free T3, Reverse T3, T4, Free T4, Reverse T4, anti-TPO antibodies and anti-thyroglobulin antibodies. Also, the optimal range of values should be considered instead of the normal ranges of these labs. For example, the normal range for TSH is generally considered to be 0.2 – 4.5. However, some studies show that the body does not function properly when TSH rises above 2.5.^{xxiv}

5. Inflammatory markers: homocysteine and CRP

The blood level of C-reactive protein (CRP) increases when there's inflammation in the body. Even better, run a high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP). This test is more sensitive than a standard test. Even mild increases are associated with increased risk of cardiac events or depression.

Homocysteine is an amino acid that requires methylated-vitamin B12 and folate to be cleared. It's an important marker that can indicate vitamin B status, ability to methylate, ability to detox, risk of heart disease, risk of stroke, etc.

Be your own advocate

"I don't like to gamble, but if there's one thing I'm willing to bet on, it's myself." ~Beyoncé

Yes, I just quoted Beyoncé. Why? Because she's the Queen Bee of course!

I want to leave you with this. If there is one message you take from this book, let it be this. You are your best and only true advocate when it comes to your body, your mind, and your health. I have been there. I have sat in a doctor's office and was told I am fine. It's all in my head. Exercise more. Go home and get some rest. Or my favorite, stop worrying so much and you'll be fine.

Or worse, here is an antidepressant or pain medication, take this and be on your way. Remember, this was when I was only 15 years old. I was not lacking rest, I was not lacking exercise, I was not too worried, and I certainly was not depressed.

My body had broken down, and *I* needed to fix it. If your body is broken, and you know there is something wrong **DO NOT STOP** until you find the right team to help you fix it! You are the only one in your body. You are the only one who knows what it feels like when it is not functioning, don't let anyone convince you otherwise.

Doctors are just people, and they don't always have the answers. Some will dig deeper and some won't. We all take the oath to do no harm, and we try our best. But sometimes our best just isn't good enough. That's where *you* have to find the physician within you, and listen to your own voice. Find the team who will walk alongside you in your healing journey.

I pray you get the help you need and recover, like I did. Godspeed.

Next steps:

I believe that annual comprehensive lab tests, including genetic testing (genes only need to be run one time) can give us a complete picture of your health status. This enables us to advise you on the best and most effective way to regain optimal health and wellness. Lifestyle choices are an integral part of our holistic health approach as well as listening to your inner voice and your body.

Also, build your healing A-team!

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