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# Introduction: The Skinny Kid Who Ate Everything and Absorbed Nothing

I used to hide sandwiches behind radiators until they grew mold.

Not because I was conducting science experiments or had some weird fetish for decomposition. I hid them because my mom packed them with love every morning, and I couldn't bear to tell her that "normal" food she made got in the way of my sugar high. So I'd smile, take the lunch, and systematically hide it in increasingly creative places—bottom of lockers, under my bed, behind heating units—until the smell gave me away months later.

This is a book about transformation, but not the kind you see in fitness magazines. There's no dramatic before-and-after photo where I went from fat to fit in 90 days. Instead, this is the story of a skinny kid who ate 4,000 calories a day and absorbed nothing, who trained four hours daily but got weaker, who slept five hours a night and called it productivity, who spent decades slowly poisoning himself while calling it normal.

At my worst, I was 155 pounds of contradiction on a six-foot frame—somehow both skinny and soft, exhausted but unable to sleep, constantly eating but always malnourished. I had IBS that sent me to the bathroom for 30 minutes after every meal. Debilitating migraines every couple of months. Energy that came only from sugar, video games and anxiety. I was the picture of everything wrong with modern health, and I didn't even know it.

## Why This Book Exists

I wrote this book because I needed it 30 years ago. I needed someone to tell me that feeling like garbage wasn't normal. That spending nine months with a cough wasn't "seasonal asthma." That living on Sunny D and ice cream while exercising four hours a day wasn't a fast metabolism—it was a quick ride to feeling 5 times older, then discovering a heart issue, cancer, diabetes, or some other auto-immune dysfunction at mid-life.

But more than that, I needed someone to show me that the solution wasn't complicated. It wasn't about finding the perfect diet or the ultimate workout plan or the magic supplement. It was about seven simple pillars of health that, when addressed with basic habits, could transform everything:

1. **Breathing** - Because I'd been restricting my airways and my potential for 30 years
2. **Sleep** - Because five hours plus caffeine and refined carbs doesn't equal eight hours of rest
3. **Hydration** - Because you can't live on juice and pop, and wonder why you have migraines
4. **Nutrition** - Because eating everything while absorbing nothing isn't a fast metabolism
5. **Movement** - Because quality movement is a stimulus for better choices, and is a much better lifestyle outlet than smart phones, video games and tv
6. **Environment** - Because humans weren't meant to live in basements year-round
7. **Mindfulness** - Because anxiety isn't a personality trait, it's a treatable condition

## What Makes This Resource Different

This isn't another health book written by someone who's always been fit, telling you to just eat less and move more. This is written by someone who did everything wrong for decades, who made every mistake possible, who normalized dysfunction so completely that rock bottom felt like home.

I'm not a doctor. I'm not a nutritionist with perfect genes. I'm not a celebrity with a team of trainers. I'm a regular guy who spent 30 years accidentally destroying himself, then figured out how to rebuild. And the rebuilding didn't require anything special—no expensive supplements, no extreme diets, no two-hour daily workouts.

It required simple things done consistently. Breathing through my nose instead of my mouth. Going to bed and waking up at the same time as my wife. Drinking water before coffee. Eating protein at breakfast. Taking ten minutes of sunlight to start the day. The basics that everyone knows but nobody does.

## What You'll Find Inside

Each chapter tells part of my disaster story, then shows you the simple fix that changed everything. You'll meet:

- The 14-year-old who chose bathroom destruction over dietary changes
- The athlete who trained harder than everyone around him but got worse results
- The gamer who thought sleep was for weak people
- The Canadian who spent six months a year living like a vampire
- The anxiety-riddled perfectionist who didn't know he was anxious

But more importantly, you'll learn the practical habits that actually work for real humans with real lives. Not Instagram-perfect routines that require unlimited time and money. Simple things like:

- How mouth-breathing is sapping your energy (and the 30-second fix)
- Why waking at the same time matters more than when you go to bed
- The tracking system that actually works (hint: it's not an app)
- What to do when you fall off track (because you will)
- Why throwing away birthday cake isn't wasteful, it's self-care

## Who This Book Is For

This book is for you if:

- You're tired all the time but don't know why
- You exercise regularly but don't see results
- You've tried every diet but you always find excuses to go back to your old ways
- You know what to do but can't seem to do it
- You suspect feeling like crap isn't normal but don't know where to start

This book is NOT for you if:

- You want a quick fix or magic pill
- You believe extreme measures are the only way
- You believe age is what is holding you back
- You think your genetics doom you to poor health
- You're looking for someone to tell you what you want to hear

## The Promise

I can't promise you'll gain 20 pounds of muscle like I did. I can't promise your IBS will disappear or your migraines will stop or your anxiety will vanish. Every body is different, and what worked for me might need tweaking for you.

What I can promise is this: if you're willing to try simple habits consistently, if you're ready to stop normalizing feeling terrible, if you can start where you are instead of waiting for perfect conditions—your life will improve. Maybe dramatically, maybe subtly, but definitively.

Because here's what I learned after 30 years of diminished outcomes and 15 years of recovery, hundreds of clients, and thousands of hours of guiding people just like you: your body wants to be healthy. It wants to be strong, energized, capable. It's programmed for vitality. You just have to stop actively preventing it from doing its job.

## How to Use This Book

Read it straight through first. See yourself in my disasters. Laugh at my stupidity. Cringe at the familiar patterns. Then go back and pick one habit from each pillar to start with. Not all of them. Not the hardest ones. The ones that seem almost insultingly easy.

Do those for 30 days. Just 30 days. Track them however works—paper, phone, check marks on your mirror. When you miss a day (you will), just start again the next day. No guilt spiral. No starting over. Just continue.

After 30 days, add more habits or modify the ones that aren't working. Keep what serves you, discard what doesn't. This isn't about following my exact blueprint—it's about building your own. When you are deciding what habits to keep and what habits to discontinue, own your bias, what activities in your day actually make you a better human versus just distracting and numbing you from the yucky stuff. Just because you are not doing something challenging in a moment of distraction, does not always mean that you are actually "filling your cup".

## **The Beginning of the End of Chronic Inflammation and Imbalance**

That kid hiding moldy sandwiches behind radiators? He thought that was just how life was. That guy exhausted playing video games or doom scrolling on the phone until 1 AM? He thought sleep was for people without ambition. The athlete who couldn't build muscle? He blamed genetics.

They were all wrong. I was wrong. For the first 30 years of my life, I accepted feeling unmotivated as my normal. I normalized exhaustion, anxiety, digestive destruction, daily bouts of abdominal pain, and diarrhea. I built an entire identity around being the guy who could eat anything and not gain weight, who needed less sleep, who pushed through pain.

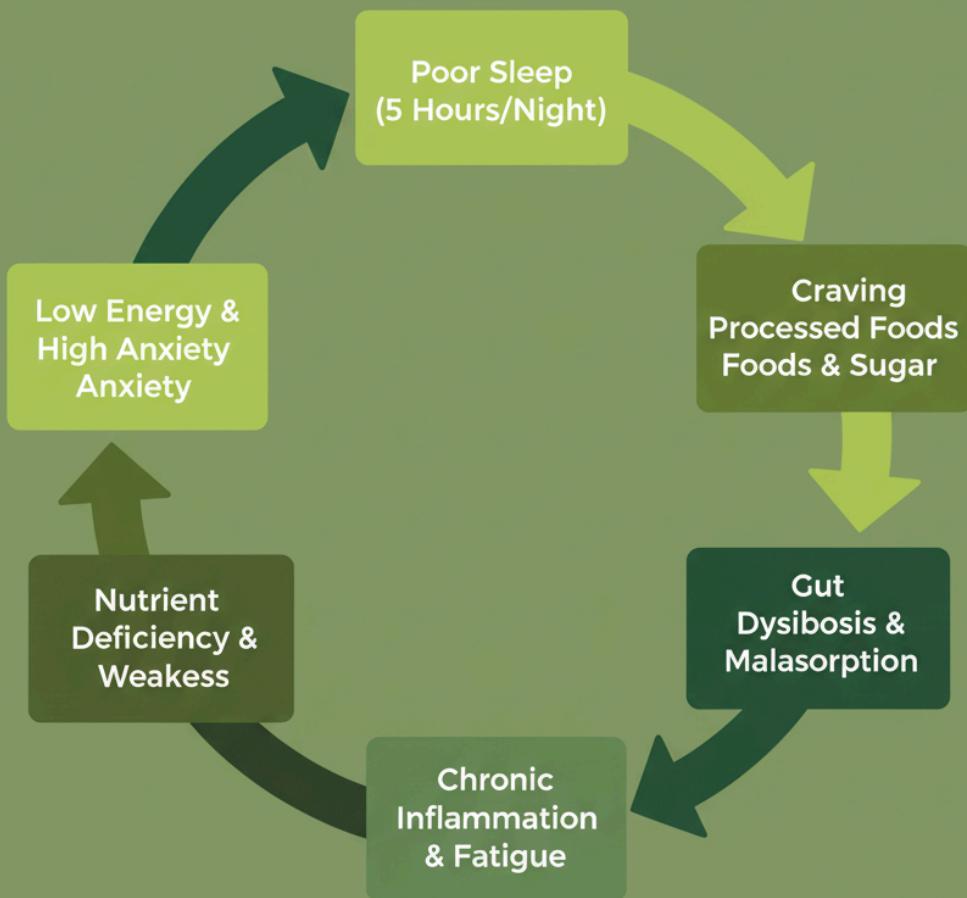
That identity was literally making me worse for everyone around me, and especially for myself.

This book is about building a new identity. One where feeling good is normal. Where energy is abundant. Where your body works with you, not against you. Where simple habits create extraordinary results. Where people ask if my energy level is always this high.

It starts with admitting that maybe—just maybe—you don't have to feel like shit when you wake up tomorrow.

And it continues with the next page.

# The Vicious Cycle of Dysfunction



\*THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF POOR HABITS.



***Chapter 1: When Your Lifestyle Choices Tell a Story***

*The doctor's office smelled like disinfectant and disappointment. I was 14, sitting on that crinkly paper that covers examination tables, trying not to think about how many other sick kids had sat here before me. My mom was in the plastic chair by the wall, doing that thing where she made sure that I was heard and seen.*

*"So," 'Dr. Martinez' said, flipping through my chart, "you're having digestive issues."*

*Digestive issues. What a polite way to describe spending 30 minutes in the bathroom after every meal, while my friends waited for me to play basketball.*

*"It's IBS," he continued. "Irritable Bowel Syndrome. Very common."*

*Common. Great. That made me feel so much better about being the kid who knew every public bathroom in a five-mile radius.*

*Then he gave me the choices that would define the next 16 years of my life:*

*"Option one: medication. It'll help, but you'll need to take it daily, probably forever."*

*"Option two: accept that you'll need those bathroom breaks. Plan your life around them."*

*I looked at my mom. She looked at me. We both knew which option a 14-year-old boy who lived for his nightly quarter-tub of ice cream was going to choose.*

*"I'll take option two."*

## ***The Price of That Choice***

*What 'Dr. Martinez' didn't explain—what nobody tells you when you're 14—is that IBS isn't just about bathroom time. It's about what your body isn't doing while it's frantically pushing everything through your system.*

*Absorption. That's the word that would haunt me for years.*

*While my friends were growing taller, getting stronger, building muscle from our shared sports practices, I remained the skinny kid who could eat 4,000 calories a day and gain nothing. Not weight, not muscle, no explosiveness. The only thing I had over a lot of my peers was endurance. Because a body that's all skin and bone, doesn't take much muscle to keep moving.*

*The salt packets became my trademark. Five, six, sometimes seven packets on my cafeteria fries. My friends thought it was gross. My body was screaming for electrolytes—any electrolytes—that might stick around long enough to matter. I was literally salting my food to the point of disgust because my body was desperate for minerals it couldn't hold onto.*

*My daily routine was a masterpiece of self-destruction:*

- Morning: Danish or croissant (butter-flavored nothing)
- Lunch: Bacon cheese bagel, salt-mountain fries
- Afternoon: 2 liters of apple juice or an entire jug of Sunny D
- Dinner: Pick at whatever meat I could isolate from Mom's cooking, hide the vegetables
- Night: Quarter tub of ice cream, every single night, like a ritual

*Then I'd hide the evidence of real food—Mom's carefully made sandwiches—behind radiators and in lockers until they grew mold. Because somehow, letting food rot felt better than admitting I wouldn't eat normally.*

## **The Dating Disaster Years**

*Nothing says "romantic evening" like pulling into a sketchy gas station after dinner so your date can wait in the car for 20 minutes while you destroy their bathroom. My future wife sat through this routine more times than any human should have to.*

*My solution? Eat less on dates. Sometimes nothing at all. Because being hungry was better than being humiliated.*

*She never complained. Never made me feel weird about it. She'd wait patiently, while I questioned my life choices from inside a Shell station bathroom.*

## **The Identity Crisis**

*Here's what I told myself for 16 years:*

- "I need the energy" (while eating pure sugar)
- "I can't gain weight anyway" (while never giving my body actual nutrients)
- "This is just how I am" (while actively choosing to stay sick)
- "At least I'm athletic" (while too depleted to reach my potential)

*I was sabotaging myself every single day, then wondering why I felt like garbage. It wasn't my body betraying me—it was me betraying my body, one danish at a time.*

## **The Day Everything Changed**

*It wasn't dramatic. There was no hospital visit, no rock bottom moment like you see in movies. I was 30, about to become a fitness professional—someone who was supposed to teach others about health. Our daughter was 2, running around with endless energy while I could barely keep up. Our son was on the way.*

*I looked in the mirror one morning at 155 pounds of contradiction on my 6-foot frame—skinny arms, soft middle, exhausted at 8 AM from staying up too late the night before.*

*The thought hit me like a brick: What kind of example am I setting?*

*My children would grow up watching me. Learning from me. What was I teaching them? That feeling tired is normal? That you should hide your struggles behind fake energy and bathroom humor?*

*My wife had been gently pushing to make better lifestyle choices for years. For example: I didn't really start eating salad 'till I was 25. "Just try it," she'd say. "What's the worst that could happen?"*

*The worst? I might actually get better. I might have to give up my identity as the guy who could eat anything and stay thin. I might have to admit I'd been wrong for 16 years.*

*I needed to own the reality that my constant consumption of sugar and highly refined foods were making my guts a mess. With messy guts your body can't come close to functioning at its best.*

## ***The Hidden Option***

*Option three was what I discovered at 30: understanding that I was the author of my own better self.*

*It was realizing:*

- *The quarter tub of ice cream wasn't comfort, it was self-harm*
- *The hidden sandwiches weren't teenage rebellion, they were me replacing some nutrition with candy from the local convenience store*
- *The IBS wasn't my identity, it was my body's desperate SOS*
- *My "fast metabolism" was actually malabsorption*
- *Every excuse I made was another day stolen from my future*

*But at 14, you don't want to hear that your nightly ice cream ritual might be the problem. At 20, you don't want to admit the Sunny D isn't actually sunshine. At 25, you're so used to feeling low energy that it becomes your normal.*

*It took wanting to be better for my family to finally want to be better for myself. It turns out that reasons external to your own identity are great ways to stay inspired and motivated.*

## ***Your Body Tells the Truth***

*Here's what took me 16 years to understand: your body never lies. It only reports the facts.*

*Every symptom is data. Every dysfunction is feedback. Every chronic issue is your body saying, "Hey, what we're doing isn't working." Random discomfort in your body isn't random, it just isn't easy to understand from the start.*

*My body spent 16 years writing detailed reports about malnutrition, inflammation, and distress. I spent 16 years shooting the messenger.*

*If you're reading this because you have IBS, or chronic fatigue, or migraines, or any collection of "issues" that you've been "managing," I need you to know something:*

*You might be sabotaging yourself and calling it self-care.*

*There's always an option three. It's not the easy option. It's not the quick option. It's the option where you stop managing symptoms and start admitting you're the author of your own story.*

*And it begins with two questions:*

- *"What if I'm doing this to myself?" - this can apply to all kinds of health issues. From the fat you want to release, to the brain fog, lethargy, and then the joint pain or breathing issues. The list goes on and on.*
  - *"What if I don't have to?" - what if you can enjoy all of your current real priorities while making investments into yourself along the way.*
- 

*In the next chapter, I'll show you how being a high school athlete made everything worse—and why training four hours a day while eating like a gas station dumpster nearly broke me completely.*



**\*BALANCE IS THE KEY TO A SMOOTH JOURNEY**

# Chapter 2: The Athletic Paradox

I was the captain of both my high school basketball and soccer teams. I got to those roles from sheer will power. From being the “try hard” all the time. Let that sink in for a second. The kid who couldn’t digest food properly, who hid sandwiches behind radiators until they grew mold, who lived on penny candy and Sunny D—that kid was leading teams.

Looking back, it’s insane. But at the time, sports were my only identity that mattered.

## The Addiction of Movement

I started martial arts at six. Taekwondo first, then six years of judo. By 12, I was provincial judo champion—throwing kids around the mat while my body was wondering if it would get digestible protein or fibre anytime soon.

Sports weren’t just something I did. They were my drug. My escape. When I was moving, I wasn’t anxious. When I was competing, I wasn’t lonely. When I was exhausted from four hours of daily training, I couldn’t feel how broken everything else was.

Before collectible card games. Before role-playing games, comics books where I’d obsess over indestructible characters with perfect stats, full on geek-dom. I used to love to geek out in all that hobby stuff. Before any of that—there was sports. The first place I learned to dissociate from my body while pushing it to its limits.

## The Perfect Storm at 12

That soccer camp story? I was 12, not in high school yet. Three-on-three tournament at Summer Camp, summer heat, everything on the line. When we lost that final by one goal, my body just... gave up.

The hyperventilating wasn’t from exertion. It was my malnourished nervous system finally hitting its breaking point. My identity as the best 12-year old soccer player at camp shattered. While other kids shook hands and moved on, I was gasping for air that wouldn’t come, crying like someone had died. In hindsight, the other kids must have thought that I was way over the top. I didn’t know that skipping over healthy lifestyle choices would just make my emotional regulation a giant roller coaster.

At 12 years old, I’d already normalized:

- Drinking 2 liters of apple juice daily
- Hiding my mom’s packed lunches behind radiators
- Replacing real food with penny candy
- Convincing myself this was all fine because I was an athlete

The crying wasn't about losing actually about losing, even though I thought it was at the time. It was my body screaming that something was fundamentally wrong. I just wasn't willing to process the gap in my approach to life.

## **The Daily Grind of Denial**

By high school, my routine was insane:

- 6 AM: Wake up
- 7 AM: Hour of basketball before school
- 8 AM-3 PM: Survive classes on sugar and adrenaline
- 3:30-6:30 PM: Practice, games, or lift heavy things
- 7 PM: Bathroom destruction from the day's "fuel"
- 8 PM-midnight: Video or card games to avoid thinking about any of the school work I was avoiding

Four hours of athletics every single day. My teammates were building muscle, getting stronger, earning scholarships. I was just burning through whatever accidental nutrients made it past my destroyed gut, wondering why I stayed at 155 pounds no matter how hard I trained.

## **The ACL: When Your Body Forces You to Stop**

Summer between grade 9 and 10. I was just starting to dunk, feeling like maybe—finally—I was becoming the athlete I desperately wanted to be. Then one wrong cut on the soccer field, and my knee exploded as I bad skewed thinking encouraged me to jam my leg in front of the tallest guy on the field so he could run right through my knee.

Here's the thing about tearing your ACL when you're already malnourished: everything about recovery is harder. The surgery. The rehab. The mental game. Your body can't rebuild what it could never build in the first place.

But the real damage was to my identity. I'd told myself stories about varsity scholarships, about being recruited, about sports being my ticket to... something. Anything that proved I was more than the anxious kid who knew every public bathroom in town.

Instead, I had to learn to shoot because I couldn't drive to the basket anymore. I had to become strategic because I couldn't be explosive. I had to watch other kids get stronger while I got craftier, telling myself that was just as good.

It wasn't.

## **The Junk Food Athlete**

The irony still kills me. I wanted so badly to be a great athlete, but I was fueling myself like a gas station dumpster:

- Breakfast: Croissant or danish (basically butter-flavored air)
- Lunch: Bacon cheese bagel + salt-bombed fries
- Drinks: Full jug of Sunny D or 2L of apple juice
- Dinner: Whatever meat I could isolate from my mom's cooking, and pasta
- Snacks: Penny candy by the handful

My mom tried everything. New lunch options. Different preparations. Creative ways to hide vegetables. I'd smile, no eye contact, take the lunch, and stuff it behind a radiator or in my locker until it grew into a science experiment.

The discoveries were always humiliating. Mom finding moldy sandwiches under my bed. Friends seeing the collection in my locker. Teachers wondering what that smell was.

But I'd just hit the corner store for more candy and keep on runnin'.

## **The Contradiction of Being "Fit"**

Here's what 155 pounds on a 6-foot frame looks like when you can't absorb nutrients: skinny arms, visible ribs, but somehow still soft around the middle. No muscle definition despite thousands of hours of training. The body of someone simultaneously overworked and undernourished.

Coaches praised my motor. "This kid never stops!" Yeah, because stopping meant feeling how depleted I was. Movement was medication. Stillness was suffering.

My genetic gifts—a little height, long arms, decent coordination—kept me competitive. But I was playing at maybe 60% of my potential. Imagine training twice as hard as everyone else just to be slightly above average.

That's what malnutrition does to an athlete. You can't out-train a body that's eating itself.

## **The College Fade**

I played a bit of college soccer, but it was clear the dream was dead. My knee never fully recovered. My body never got stronger. My anxiety got worse as the stakes got higher.

By my mid-20s, after another knee surgery, I finally admitted what everyone else could see: my brain didn't have a casual setting for sports. I either went 100% or didn't play at all. And 100% meant destroying what was left of my joints for what? Tuesday night pickup games?

The identity I'd clung to since age six—athlete, competitor, warrior—had to die for the rest of me to live.

## The Real Competition

Looking back, I wasn't competing against other players. I was competing against my own body. Trying to prove I could overcome IBS through sheer will. Trying to show that determination could beat malnutrition.

Spoiler alert: it can't.

All those hours. All that effort. All that identity wrapped up in being an athlete while actively poisoning myself with junk food and other poor lifestyle choices.

The real tragedy? I genuinely loved sports. The feeling of a perfect shot. The rush of a good play. The bond with teammates. But I experienced all of it through a fog of exhaustion, anxiety, and bathroom planning that I'd normalized as "just how I am."

It would take becoming a fitness professional at 30—and wanting to be a better example for my family—to finally connect the dots between what I ate and how I felt.

But first, I had to spend another decade learning that 5 hours of sleep wasn't a badge of honor. It was another way to slowly destroy myself while calling it dedication.

# THE ATHLETIC PARADOX: TRAINING VS. RESULTS

## THE CONTRDITION OF THE JUNK FOOD ATHLETE



## THE CONTRDITION OF THE JUNK FOOD ATHLETE

*Next, I'll show you how my restricted breathing, was tripping up my energetic day.*

# **Chapter 3: The Day I Learned to Breathe**

My wife nudged me in the ribs for the third time that night. "You're doing it again."

"Doing what?" I mumbled, still half-asleep.

"Not breathing. You just stopped for like 20 seconds. It's freaking me out."

I was 30 years old, and my wife was literally watching me suffocate in my sleep. My snoring had gotten so bad she worried it would wake our 2-year-old daughter down the hall. But the snoring wasn't the worst part—it was the silence between snores. The moments where my body just... forgot to breathe.

Sleep apnea runs in my family, but I'd convinced myself I was different. Sure, I snored like a chainsaw. Sure, I woke up exhausted every morning. Sure, I needed two-hour afternoon naps to function. But that was normal for busy people, right?

Wrong.

## **The Night I Peed on the Furniture**

Here's something nobody tells you about shitty sleep quality—it makes you do insane things while unconscious.

One night, a long long time ago, my wife woke up to find me standing in the corner of our bedroom. Not just standing. Peeing. On our dresser. While completely asleep.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" she screamed.

I woke up mid-stream, confused, horrified, still peeing. Have you ever tried to stop peeing while half-asleep and fully mortified? It's like trying to stop a freight train with your mind.

That wasn't even the worst incident. A few weeks later, deep in some dream, I tried to adjust my pillow. Except my "pillow" was her face. I head-butted her so hard she saw stars.

"I'M SO SORRY!" I gasped, finally awake, seeing her holding her nose.

"What is WRONG with you?" she asked, checking for blood.

What was wrong was that I wasn't breathing properly—not during the day, and definitely not at night. My brain was so oxygen-deprived it couldn't even keep me from assaulting furniture and family members in my sleep.

## The Sleepwalking Chronicles

The sleep-talking started innocently enough. She would ask me questions, thinking I was awake:

Her: "Did you set your alarm?" Me: "The dolphins need bicycles." Her: "...What?" Me: "For the race. Obviously."

She'd try to talk to me while this was happening, so she could make some sense of it all. I had no memory of any of it. But as my breathing got worse, so did the sleep activities:

- Walking out of hotel rooms
- Trying to climb out of windows at the cottage
- Having full conversations about nonsense

My body was so desperate for proper oxygen and more sleep that it couldn't even shut down correctly for sleep. I was living in a state of constant semi-suffocation, and my brain was short-circuiting every night.

## The Athletic Suffocation

During workouts, my breathing was just as fucked. I'd hold my breath during heavy lifts—because that's what tough guys do, right? Wrong. I'd get lightheaded, see spots, feel nauseous. Nearly passed out doing squats more than once.

"Breathe!" my personal trainer partners would yell.

But I didn't know how. Mouth open, gasping like a fish, hyperventilating between sets. No wonder my cardio sucked. No wonder I couldn't build endurance. I was basically waterboarding myself with air.

My explosive power—the ability to sprint, jump, lift heavy—was capped by my inability to get oxygen to my muscles efficiently. I thought I was just "not a cardio guy." Turns out I was just a "doesn't know how to breathe guy."

## The Book That Changed How I Breath

At 30, newly committed to becoming a fitness professional (and not being a hypocrite), I started devouring health books. Every single one mentioned breathing. At first, I skipped those chapters. Breathing? I've been doing it for 30 years, thanks.

But they kept coming up. Author after author saying the same thing:

- Most people breathe wrong
- Mouth breathing destroys sleep quality
- Your breath controls your nervous system
- Nasal breathing changes everything

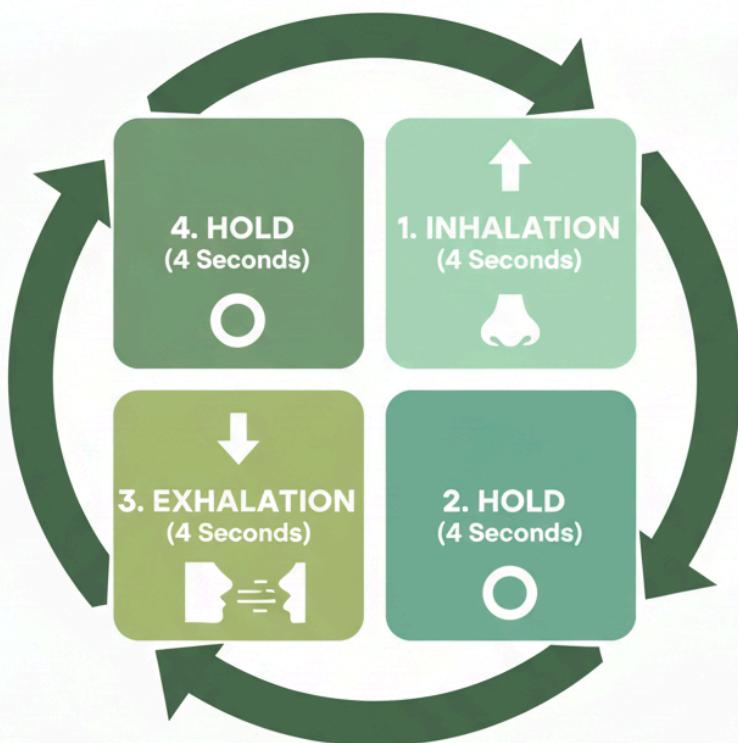
Mark Divine's book introduced me to box breathing. Four counts in through the nose, hold for four, four counts out through the nose, hold for four. Simple, right?

First attempt: Couldn't even finish one cycle through my nose. My nostrils felt like trying to breathe through coffee stirrers. My chest got tight. I panicked and gulped air through my mouth like a drowning man.

This was my "holy shit" moment. I couldn't even breathe slowly for 16 seconds without panicking.

Then I started to learn that there were several different great resources on better breathing habits, Wim Hoff, Warrior Breathing, Yogic Breathing. I started to apply portions of all of it, finding what worked for me, and what I could consistently do.

## BOX BREATHING: YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM ANCHOR



EQUALIZE YOUR BREATH. CALM YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM.

### The Humbling Journey to Nasal Breathing

Learning to breathe through my nose during the day was like learning to write with my non-dominant hand. Everything felt wrong:

**Week 1:** Constant feeling of suffocation. Mouth hanging open from habit. Kelly catching me and saying "Mouth closed!" like I was a toddler.

**Week 2:** Could make it through meals breathing through my nose. Noticed I was chewing slower, tasting food more. Weird.

**Week 3:** First workout breathing only through nose. Had to cut the intensity by 40%. Ego crushed. But I didn't feel like dying after.

**Week 4:** My wife mentioned I was snoring less. I was waking up without the usual sandpaper throat.

## The Box Breath Breakthrough

Remember Mark Divine's box breathing? I started using it everywhere:

**Stuck in traffic?** Box breathing instead of road rage. **Can't sleep?** Three cycles and I was out cold. **Pre-workout?** Box breathing to prepare my nervous system. **Stressed about money?** Box breathing to think clearly.

It became my reset button. The same guy who used to head-butt his wife in his sleep was now falling asleep peacefully after three simple breathing cycles.

The sleep-talking stopped. The sleepwalking ended. The furniture remained pee-free.

## The Unexpected Benefits

When you fix your breathing, weird things happen:

**Energy:** No more 2-hour afternoon naps. Turns out when you oxygen your brain properly, you don't crash at 2 PM.

**Digestion:** Deep belly breathing massages your internal organs. My IBS symptoms started improving just from breathing properly.

**Anxiety:** That constant low-grade panic I'd carried since childhood? Mostly gone. Can't be anxious when you're breathing like a calm person.

**Strength:** Once I learned to breathe during lifts—inhale on the lowering, exhale on the exertion—my numbers jumped 20% in a month.

**Recovery:** Between sets, between workouts, between stressful events. Everything recovered faster when I wasn't hyperventilating 24/7.

## The Simple Truth Nobody Tells You

Here's what pisses me off: This information was always available. Every athlete, every fitness professional, every half-decent coach knows about breathing. But nobody teaches it to kids. Nobody told the hyperventilating 12-year-old at soccer camp that he was breathing wrong. Just standard anti-hyperventilation techniques with a paper bag.

We'll teach kids how to kick a ball, how to shoot a basket, how to throw a punch. But we won't teach them how to breathe while doing it.

I spent 30 years suffocating myself—during sports, during sleep, during sex, during life. All because nobody said: "Hey, maybe try breathing through your nose."

## Your Breath Test

Right now, as you read this, notice your breathing:

- Is your mouth open?
- Are you breathing into your chest or belly?
- How many breaths per minute? (Should be 9-15, not 15-20)

If you snore, wake up tired, need afternoon naps, feel anxious, get lightheaded during exercise, or have peed on any furniture recently—your breathing needs work.

Start with one thing: Close your mouth. Breathe through your nose for the next five breaths. Slow. Into your belly.

Feel different? That's your nervous system saying "FINALLY."

## The Daily Practice That Costs Nothing

Every morning, before I poison myself with coffee, before I check my phone, before the chaos begins:

1. Five minutes of nasal breathing
2. Box breath: 4 in, hold 4, 4 out, hold 4
3. Repeat until calm

No apps. No equipment. No gym membership. Just me and the nose I ignored for 30 years.

This simple practice did more for my sleep than any pill. More for my anxiety than avoiding problems. More for my fitness than any supplement.

And unlike all the other shit I'd tried, this one was free, always available, and impossible to forget at home.

Your breath is your life force. Stop treating it like an afterthought.

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*Next, I'll show you why I thought 5 hours of sleep was productive, and how staying up until 2 AM gaming was keeping me from doing all the things that are truly important to me.*

## **Weekly Healthy Breathing Habits Tracking Worksheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ | Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Lifestyle Habits for Healthy Breathing:**

1. **Breathe through your nose:** Focus on nasal breathing during the day and while sleeping.
2. **Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Inhale into your belly and lower back first, then expand to your chest and shoulders. Exhale in reverse order.
3. **Mindful Breath Holds:** Practice holding your breath briefly after an inhale and an exhale to enhance awareness.
4. **Adjust Breathing Pace:** Use slower exhales to relax and faster inhales to energize yourself as needed.
5. **Encourage Nasal Breathing While Sleeping:** Try gently taping your mouth at night to ensure nasal breathing.

### **Instructions:**

- Track your habits daily by writing notes for each day.
- Add any reflections or observations in the notes section.

### **Reflections at the End of the Week:**

- **What worked well for you this week?**

- **What challenges did you face?**

- **Goals for next week:**

## Chapter 4: The 5-Hour Sleep Delusion

At 12:47 AM, the credits finally rolled on the second action movie of the night, or final video game quest. My eyes burned like they'd been sandblasted, and every blink stung, but I was wide awake in the worst way. I should've gone to bed two hours ago—actually, I should've gone to bed at 9:30, like someone who valued the productive and fulfilling actions of the next day.

But that's the thing about chasing the next rush—whether it's a boss fight, a plot twist, or just background noise that drowns out the quiet. You tell yourself it's harmless. Just one more. Just until the next save point, or the next scene, or the next dopamine hit.

Victory tasted like stale snacks and lukewarm caffeine.

I had less than five or six hours until the day demanded my attention again. And not just from work or a calendar—real responsibilities. The kind that deserve more of me than what I have left after a night like this.

But instead of powering down and salvaging what sleep I could, I started scrolling for the next movie to watch. Because when you're in a cycle of staying up late, you don't look for excuses to stop. You look for reasons to keep going.

### The Sandpaper Eyes

Let me paint you a picture of what happens when you stare at a screen for 4.5 hours straight without blinking enough, while dehydrated, running on 5 hours of sleep:

Your eyes don't just get dry. They feel like someone replaced your tears with ground glass. Every blink is agony. Light becomes your enemy. You squint at everything—all the things you treasure, and the beauty of the World, all the squinted dehydrated eyes that have been spending way too many hours on screen time.

I'd wake up unable to open my eyes without physically prying them apart. The crust wasn't just sleep—it was my body's desperate attempt to protect what moisture remained. I'd stumble to the bathroom, splash water on my face, and promise myself tonight would be different.

It wasn't different.

## The Lies I Told Myself

"I'm just not someone who needs much sleep."

That was my favorite lie, the rediculousness of it makes me smile even now. I'd read somewhere that some CEOs only slept 4-5 hours a night, even the Arnold would brag about his 6 hour sleeps in the early days of his career. Therefore, I must be one of those genetic anomalies who thrived on minimal sleep. Never mind that I needed a constant sugar fix to get through the day. Never mind the afternoon crash that hit like a truck. Never mind that I was basically a zombie with a pulse.

Other lies included:

- "I'm being productive with my free time"
- "This is my only time to myself"
- "I'll catch up on sleep this weekend"
- "At least I'm not out drinking"

What I was really saying: "I'd rather slowly kill myself than face the boredom of being present in my actual life."

## The Daughter I Kept Falling Asleep On

Here's a memory that still guts me: Standing next to my daughter's crib at 9:30 PM, rubbing her back to help her fall asleep. She's looking up at me with those trusting eyes, needing her dad to be present, to be there.

I fell asleep with one hand on her back in the crib while I lay on the floor beside her.

I was so exhausted that I couldn't even stay awake for the ten minutes it took to soothe my own child.

My priorities were fucked. Maybe this is a good time to reflect on your priorities. Are you choosing your health and the people you really care about, or just looking for your next distraction?

## The Invisible Damage

The insidious part about sleep deprivation is that it doesn't kill you dramatically. It kills you slowly, like carbon monoxide poisoning of the soul. You don't realize how impaired you are because impaired becomes your baseline.

I thought I was functioning fine because I could still:

- Drive without crashing
- Party with my friends
- Spend time with my wife
- Show up to work
- Have conversations with my family
- Play with my daughter, before my son was born (when awake)

What I couldn't see was everything I was losing:

- **Creativity:** Every idea was beige
- **Patience:** Snapping at smallest little things
- **Initiative:** Always procrastinating, getting shit done in the last minute is never your best effort
- **Innovation:** Choosing the easiest path always
- **Joy:** Everything felt like an obligation

I was a watered-down version of myself, thinking I was at full strength.

## The Research That Ruined My Rationalization

At 30, studying to become a fitness professional, I had to read the sleep research. And holy shit, it was like reading my own death certificate:

### 5 hours of sleep increases risk of:

- Diabetes by 200%
- Heart disease by 148%
- Stroke by 15%
- Cancer by 36%
- Early death by 12%

**But wait, there's more!**

- Testosterone drops 15% (Explains barrier to muscle growth)
- Growth hormone plummets (no wonder I couldn't recover)
- Cortisol spikes (and so my anxiety went up)
- Leptin drops, ghrelin rises (no wonder I craved garbage food all day long, literally a bottomless pit)

I was giving myself the hormonal profile of an 80-year-old man at 28.

## The Gradual Awakening

There was no rock bottom moment. No dramatic intervention. Just the slow realization that I felt progressively less energetic and my digestion wasn't getting any better. Choosing the illusion of productivity over genuine rest.

The research helped. Learning that sleep wasn't for the weak—it was for people who wanted to be strong. That every hour of sleep debt was stealing IQ points, reaction time, and years off my life.

But what really changed things was connecting it to my family. Every night I stayed up was a morning I'd be a troll instead of myself. Every hour I stole from sleep was an hour I couldn't be fully present.

## The New Sleep Reality

Fixing my sleep wasn't dramatic. I just started going to bed when my wife did.

First week was torture. Lying there at 10:30 PM, mind racing, fear of missing out on... what? Movies and games that nobody cares about?

But then:

- Eyes stopped burning
- Mornings became bearable
- Coffee became a choice, not life support
- My kids got a dad who could stay awake during bedtime stories

My body would have burned out much faster if I hadn't made that course correction as I got into fitness.

## The Truth About Your Sleep

If you're reading this at 1 AM, telling yourself you'll go to bed after "one more" anything—you're me 15 years ago. If your eyes burn, your patience is shot, and you're falling asleep during your kids' bedtime—you're not a night owl. You're just avoiding something.

Sleep isn't a luxury. It's not for the weak. It's literally when your body repairs itself, your brain consolidates memories, and your hormones reset. Skipping sleep to be "productive" is like skipping oil changes to save time. Sure, your car still runs. Until it doesn't.

The hardest part about fixing sleep is admitting that you're not special. You're not one of those rare humans who only needs 5 hours. You're just another person slowly destroying themselves, encouraging early onset metabolic disease, and calling it a lifestyle.

## The Simple Change

Turn everything off at the same time as your partner. That's it. A hard shut off time for electronics. No "just checking" anything. When they sleep, you sleep. It will be a work in progress, and the progress will show.

TV, video, and social media games don't mean anything if you can't share them with the people you love. Your shows will still be there tomorrow. Your doom scrolling can wait.

But your life? Your family? Your health? Those have expiration dates.

And they're sooner than you think.

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*Next, I'll show you how I lived with daily migraines for decades, my head felt like it was in a vice—until I discovered that water isn't just a suggestion, it is medicine.*

## Weekly Sleep Habits Tracking Tool

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_ | Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions:

Each day, check off the habits you completed to support better sleep. These behaviors are simple, measurable, and proven to improve sleep quality over time. Use the reflection space to track how your sleep felt and what adjustments you might need.

| Day    | Woke up at<br>the same time<br>as yesterday | Avoided<br>screens 1 hr<br>before bed | Avoided<br>caffeine after<br>12 p.m. | Slept in a<br>dark, quiet,<br>cool space | Slept 7+ hours |
|--------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Monday | [ ]   | [ ]                                   | [ ]                                  | [ ]                                      | [ ]            |

|           |     |     |     |     |     |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Tuesday   | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| Wednesday | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| Thursday  | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| Friday    | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| Saturday  | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| Sunday    | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

#### Weekly Reflection Questions:

1. On which days did you feel the most rested and alert?
  -
2. Which habit was the hardest to stick to this week?
  -
3. What's one small change you can make next week to improve your sleep even more?
  -

## Chapter 5: The Dehydration Decades

I was halfway between Bowmanville and Guelph when my vision started to blur. The highway lines began dancing, my head felt like someone was driving nails through my temples, and I knew what was coming. Another migraine.

Pulling over wasn't an option—I had to get home. So I white-knuckled the steering wheel, turned around, and drove 45 minutes back while my brain tried to escape through my eye sockets. By the time I stumbled through my front door, I could barely see.

Dark room. Blackout blinds. 2 liters of water chugged like medicine. Then nothing but darkness and prayer that sleep would kill the pain.

This was my life every 3-6 months throughout my twenties. And I thought it was normal.

## The Migraine Lottery

Here's what a migraine felt like for me:

- Starts as pressure behind one eye
- Spreads like lightning across my skull
- Vision goes blurry, like looking through frosted glass
- Nausea hits like seasickness on dry land
- Light becomes my enemy—even a crack under the door is agony
- Sounds feel like hammers on my brain

Any of this sound like you? The only cure? Complete darkness, a couple liters of water, and sleep. Sometimes 4 hours. Sometimes 8. Sometimes I'd wake up and it would still be there, waiting, like a late night craving for junk food that won't stop calling my name.

I'd pop Advil like candy, whatever it took. Nothing really worked except time, darkness, and—though I didn't realize it—water.

## The Salt Packet Cover-Up

Remember those 6-7 salt packets on my fries? Here's what was really happening:

My body was desperately thirsty. Chronically, dangerously dehydrated. But instead of drinking water, I was salting everything to unconsciously replace the electrolytes I was pissing away through IBS-induced diarrhea.

I was literally trying to eat my hydration.

The salt made me thirstier, but I'd interpret that as hunger. So I'd eat more salty food. Get thirstier. Eat more. It was a dehydration death spiral disguised as teenage appetite. I remember being so full of salt that after intense sets of basketball the salt would be crusted onto my skin

where sweat had accumulated. Or doing intense interval sets and feeling the stinging in my eyes from my own sweat, that's not normal by the way.

My body was screaming for water, and I was giving it french fries, and bacon.

## The Invisible Desert

During high school sports—4 hours a day, remember—my hydration strategy was revolutionary:

- Drink when coach said to
- Stop at the water fountain between classes
- Maybe have something with meals

That's it. Four hours of sweating, and I'd maybe drink 500ml of actual water. The rest was Sunny D, apple juice, pop or whatever fluid came with food.

I thought being thirsty during sports was just part of being tough. Real athletes don't need water breaks. We push through.

I was so ignorant.

## The Lost Decades of Fog

Here's what chronic dehydration stole from me:

**Clarity:** Every decision was made through fog. School was harder than it needed to be. Conversations took more effort. Creative ideas? What creative ideas?

**Energy:** Thought I needed naps because of poor sleep. Nope. Dehydrated brain equals exhausted human.

**Potential:** How many opportunities did I miss because my brain was running on empty? How many better choices could I have made if I could actually think straight?

**Connection:** Hard to be present with people when your head feels stuffed with cotton.

I spent 25+ years operating at maybe 70% capacity, thinking that was my 100%.

## The Water Awakening

The revelation didn't come from some guru or expensive course. It came from my wife going through a "hyper-nourishing" protocol five years ago. Part of it required drinking a gallon of water daily.

A GALLON. That's almost 4 liters (actually 3.79 liters).

"That's insane," I said, while probably dehydrated.

But I tried it to support her. First day felt like I was drowning from the inside. Peeed every 30 minutes. Thought my bladder would explode.

Then, around day 3, something shifted:

- Woke up without sandpaper eyes
- Afternoon energy crash disappeared
- Thoughts felt... clearer? Like someone had cleaned my mental windshield

By week 2, I realized I hadn't had a headache. Not even a small one.

By month 2, no migraine. First time in my adult life I'd gone two months without my brain trying to kill me.

## The Simple Math of Suffering

Let me break down my hydration before and after:

### **Before (25 years of dehydration):**

- Maybe 1-2 cups of actual water daily
- Rest from juice, sports drinks, food moisture
- Total: Maybe 1.5 liters on a good day
- Migraines: Every 3-6 months
- Headaches: Weekly
- Advil consumption: Bottle every 2 months

### **After (proper hydration):**

- 3-4 liters of water daily
- Start every morning with a full glass (500 ml)
- Carry water everywhere
- Migraines: Maybe once every 2 years
- Headaches: Quarterly, and mild
- Advil consumption: Maybe 8 pills per YEAR

## The Hunger That Was Actually Thirst

Here's the craziness about dehydration: it disguises itself as hunger.

All those times I thought I needed food? Most of them I just needed water. But I'd never tested it. Never thought, "Let me drink a glass of water and see if I'm still hungry in 10 minutes."

Now I do. And 70% of the time, the "hunger" disappears.

No wonder I couldn't gain weight despite exercising 4 hours a day. I was eating my thirst, and my IBS was letting it all slide out of me.

## The Compound Effect of Water

When you're properly hydrated, everything works better:

- **Digestion:** Water helps break down food (IBS improved)
- **Brain function:** Your brain is 75% water (goodbye, fog)
- **Temperature regulation:** Less overheating during workouts, or just hanging out in the Sun
- **Joint lubrication:** Less pain, better movement
- **Nutrient transport:** Actually getting benefits from food
- **Waste removal:** Toxins out, health in

It's not that water is magic. It's that dehydration is poison, and I'd been slowly poisoning myself since childhood.

## The Tragedy of Lost Potential

This is what kills me: How much better could I have been?

If I'd been hydrated in high school, maybe I'd have been the athlete I pretended to be. If I'd been hydrated in my twenties, maybe I'd have been more focused in my career choices. If I'd been hydrated as a young father, maybe I'd have been more present.

All those migraines. All those foggy days. All those missed opportunities. For want of water.

The most basic human need after air, and sleep, I just ignored it for decades.

## Your Dehydration Check

Right now, as you read this:

- When did you last drink water? (Coffee doesn't count)
- What color was your last pee? (Should be pale yellow)
- Do you get regular headaches? (They're not normal)
- Do you salt everything? (Might be hidden thirst)
- Are you tired despite sleeping 7.5 or more hours of sleep? (Could be dehydration)

If you can't remember your last glass of water, you're dehydrated. If you get headaches regularly, you're dehydrated. If you're reading this with dry eyes and a foggy brain, you're dehydrated.

## The Free Medicine

Water is the closest thing we have to a miracle drug in developed countries:

- Costs almost nothing
- No side effects
- Available everywhere
- Fixes problems you didn't know you had
- Makes everything else work better
- Takes almost no time out of your day to drink, just to pee, and that gets better.

Yet we ignore it for energy drinks, coffee, and whatever garbage has better marketing.

Start tomorrow with a full glass of water. Before coffee. Before phone. Before excuses.

Then drink another glass mid-morning. Another at lunch. Another mid-afternoon. Another at dinner.

That's it. That's the whole system.

Your migraines might disappear. Your energy might return. Your brain might finally work like it's supposed to.

All for the price of turning on a tap.

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*Next, I'll show you how I ate 4,000 calories a day and stayed malnourished, hiding sandwiches until they grew mold while my body literally ate itself from the inside out.*

## Weekly Hydration Habits Tracking Tool

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_ | Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions:

Track your daily water intake over the next 7 days. Aim to build awareness around how much water you're actually drinking and how it lines up with your needs. For most people, that's roughly 2–3 liters per day. Use the notes section to reflect on patterns, challenges, or improvements.

| <b>Day</b> | <b>Reached hydration target (2–3L or more)</b> | <b>Started day with a full glass of water</b> | <b>Carried a water bottle throughout the day</b> | <b>Stopped drinking 2 hrs before bed</b> |
|------------|--|---|--|--|
| Monday     | [ ]  | [ ]   | [ ]  | [ ]                                      |
| Tuesday    | [ ]  | [ ]   | [ ]  | [ ]                                      |
| Wednesday  | [ ]  | [ ]   | [ ]  | [ ]                                      |
| Thursday   | [ ]  | [ ]   | [ ]  | [ ]                                      |
| Friday     | [ ]  | [ ]   | [ ]  | [ ]                                      |
| Saturday   | [ ]  | [ ]   | [ ]  | [ ]                                      |
| Sunday     | [ ]  | [ ]   | [ ]  | [ ]                                      |

#### Weekly Reflection Questions:

1. What helped you stay more hydrated this week?
  -
2. When did you feel most energized or clear-headed?
  -
3. What small adjustment could help you drink more consistently next week?
  -

# **Chapter 6: Eating Everything, Absorbing Nothing**

The smell hit my friends first. That distinctive rot that only comes from food left to die in darkness. They were digging through their lockers looking for a textbook when one of them gagged.

"Dude, what is that smell?"

I knew immediately. My heart dropped as I watched them trace the stench to my locker. Inside, at the bottom, was a graveyard of sandwiches in various stages of decomposition. Some were three months old. Some were seven. The Ziploc bags had turned into science experiments—dark green and brown mold creating its own ecosystem in Tupperware containers my mom had lovingly packed.

"Is that... are those sandwiches?"

I was in grade 5. Maybe grade 6. And I'd been caught hoarding moldy food like some kind of deranged squirrel.

## **The Architecture of Self-Sabotage**

My hiding spots were strategic:

- Bottom of backpack (2-3 sandwiches)
- Bottom of locker (5-10 sandwiches)
- Under my bed (who knows how many)
- Behind bedroom radiators (the overflow)

Each sandwich represented a meal my mom had made with determination to get me to eat anything, despite my picky nature. Each one I'd smiled and accepted, then systematically hidden rather than admit I couldn't eat "normal" food. The guilt of wasting them was somehow less than the shame of being the picky kid who only ate garbage.

When Mom found the radiator stash—we're talking months of accumulated decay—she grounded me for two weeks. The grounding never stuck. What stuck was the pattern: hide the real food, buy the junk food, destroy my body, repeat.

## **The Penny Candy Hustle**

After school, I'd hit the corner store with military precision. This was the late 80s, early 90s, when penny candy was actually a penny and store clerks trusted kids to count honestly.

I didn't count honestly.

My favorites:

- Swedish berries (the red ones)
- Fuzzy peaches (covered in that sour sugar)
- Cherry blasters (pure chemical cherry)

I'd grab 40-50 pieces.

I'd bike home with pockets full of sugar, eat it all before dinner, then wonder why Mom's cooking had no flavour and my stomach was upset.

## The Ice Cream Ceremony

Every night, two hours after dinner like clockwork, I'd perform my ritual:

1. Get the 1.89L tub (the big one)
2. Fill a bowl with a quarter of it (yes, QUARTER)
3. Add chocolate chips
4. Add cocoa powder
5. Drown it in chocolate syrup

Not Hershey's syrup. The cheap corn syrup garbage that was basically brown sugar water.

Favorite flavors on rotation:

- Chocolate chip cookie dough
- Chocolate fudge crackle
- Chocolate mint

I wasn't even secretive about it. I'd sit in front of the TV, proud of my "fast metabolism," eating enough ice cream to feed a family of four. Then, like clockwork, 30 minutes later I'd be destroying the bathroom while my body rejected everything I'd just consumed.

Every. Single. Night.

## A Day in the Nutritional Life of a Carb-monster

Age 20-something, here's what feeding myself looked like:

**Breakfast:** Bowl of Vector cereal, eaten DRY, loaded with chocolate chips. Because apparently, Vector wasn't sweet enough.

**Lunch:** Grilled sandwich with... wait for it... chicken AND peanut butter. Together. In the same sandwich, grilled in a sandwich maker, covering the bread in butter to prevent any sticking. Even typing this makes me gag.

**Snacks:** Whatever candy I could get my hands on.

**Dinner:** Pizza pockets or Bagel Bites. You know, for variety.

**Drinks:** An ENTIRE JUG of Sunny D. Not a glass. A jug or a 2-liter can of apple juice.

**Dessert:** The quarter-tub ice cream monstrosity

Total calories: Probably 4,000+ Total nutrition: Essentially zero

## The 155-Pound Paradox

At 6 feet tall and 155 pounds, I was a walking contradiction. When I did look in the mirror (rarely), I saw:

- Arms with no definition despite 4 hours of daily sports
- Ribs visible from the front
- Somehow still soft around the middle
- No ass whatsoever (my jeans hung like curtains)
- The muscle tone of overcooked spaghetti

I told myself I was "lean." What I was was malnourished. My body was eating its own muscle tissue because I wasn't giving it anything real to work with.

Clothes hung on me like I was a scarecrow. Medium shirts looked like larges. 30-inch waist pants needed belts cranked to the last hole. But I normalized it all because I'd never known different.

# MALABSORPTION VS. FAST METABOLISM (THE TRUTH)

## THE MYTH



Input: 4,000 Calories  
of Junk Food.



## THE REALITY



- Output: 155 LBS, Malnourished
- Chronic Fatigue & Brain Fog
- Nutrient Deficiencies
- Weak & Prone to Injury



## THE TRUTH ABOUT "EATING ANYTHING" AND STAYING SKINNY

### The Lactose Revelation

Here's the fucked up part: I KNEW dairy destroyed me. Every bowl of ice cream = 30 minutes on the toilet. Every glass of milk = stomach cramps. Every cheese-loaded meal = IBS flare-up.

Did I stop eating dairy? Of course not.

Instead, I developed elaborate coping mechanisms:

- Time ice cream for when I'd be home for the night
- Avoid dairy before dates (usually)
- Accept that bathroom destruction was just part of life
- Stock up on toilet paper like a doomsday prepper

It wasn't until I was 30 that I finally connected the dots: maybe constantly poisoning yourself with foods you can't digest isn't a sustainable life strategy.

## The Transformation Timeline

At 30, becoming a fitness professional, I finally had to face the truth: you can't teach health while eating like a garbage disposal.

**First real vegetable I enjoyed:** Spinach in a smoothie (couldn't taste it)

**First actual salad:** Creamy Poppy Seed, drowning in dressing, basically lettuce soup

**Body's initial reaction:** Confusion. What is this fiber? These vitamins? Why isn't everything sugar?

**The gain phase:**

- Month 1-3: Digestive system learning to actually digest
- Month 4-6: First signs of muscle definition
- Month 7-12: Holy shit, are those abs?
- Month 13-18: 175 pounds of actual human, not scarecrow

The biggest shock? I was eating LESS volume but gaining healthy weight. Turns out when you absorb nutrients, you don't need 4,000 calories of garbage to feel full.

## The Real Cost of Junk

This wasn't just about weight or muscle. The junk food diet was destroying:

- **My brain:** Constant fog, poor focus, anxiety
- **My wallet:** \$5-10 daily on corner store garbage
- **My relationships:** Too sick/tired to be present
- **My potential:** Operating at 40% capacity
- **My future:** Setting up for diabetes, heart disease, colon cancer, pick your digestive auto-immune disease of choice

Every Swedish berry was a choice. Every hidden sandwich was a decision. Every quarter-tub of ice cream was me "kicking the can" to future me.

# The Simple Truth About Nutrition

You are what you eat, but more importantly, you are what you ABSORB.

I was eating 4,000 calories and absorbing maybe 1,000. The rest was feeding my toilet, not my body.

When I finally started eating real food:

- Vegetables (even hidden in smoothies)
- Actual protein (not peanut butter chicken sandwiches)
- Complex carbs (not Sunny D)
- Healthy fats (not ice cream soup)

My body didn't know what to do. It was like giving a drowning man oxygen—overwhelming but lifesaving.

## Your Hidden Sandwiches

What are you hiding? What are you eating in shame? What foods are you choosing that are slowly killing you while you rationalize it as "just how you are"?

Your mom's moldy sandwiches might be:

- Daily McDonald's
- Energy drinks for breakfast
- Granola bars that are just candy
- "Coffee" that's also 500 calories of sugar

The details don't matter. The pattern does. You're choosing slow poison and calling it convenience.

## The Recovery Recipe

It's simpler than you think:

1. Stop eating foods that make you run to the bathroom
2. Eat something green every day (even hidden in smoothies)
3. Satisfy your appetite with protein instead of liquid sugar
4. Choose foods your great-grandparents would recognize

You don't need a complex diet. You need to stop actively poisoning yourself.

Your body wants to be strong. It wants to absorb nutrients. It wants to build muscle and burn clean.

But first, you have to stop feeding it garbage and calling it fuel.

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*Next, I'll show you how four hours of daily movement couldn't overcome a broken body, and why being the "athletic kid" while malnourished was like trying to build a house on quicksand.*

## Nutrition Tracking Tool

I find the strongest parts of nutrition that are commonly missed and relatively easy to track are protein and fibre. If you account for both of these, then chances are that you are getting enough calories, enough protein to stay metabolically active and enough micronutrients to cover all of your vitamins and minerals.

### *Protein*

0.8 grams of protein per pound per day.

So if I weigh 170lbs than I will ideally consume about ( $170 \times 0.8 = 136$ ) 136 grams of protein daily.

If you operate in kilograms that would be about 1.5 grams of protein per kilogram per day.

These are not exact numbers. I am trying to help you have a clear understanding of what that looks like. Here is a chart of some common sources of protein for your reference.

In grams.

1. Chicken breast (cooked) - 100 grams

2. Salmon (cooked) - 85 grams
3. Greek yogurt - 250 grams
4. Tofu - 185 grams
5. Lentils (cooked) - 80 grams
6. Black beans (cooked) - 80 grams
7. Quinoa (cooked) - 110 grams
8. Almonds - 85 grams
9. Eggs - 210 grams (approximately 4 large eggs)
10. Cottage cheese - 250 grams

In ounces.

1. Chicken breast (cooked) - 3.5 ounces
2. Salmon (cooked) - 3 ounces
3. Greek yogurt - 8.8 ounces
4. Tofu - 6.5 ounces
5. Lentils (cooked) - 2.8 ounces
6. Black beans (cooked) - 2.8 ounces
7. Quinoa (cooked) - 3.9 ounces
8. Almonds - 3 ounces
9. Eggs - 7.4 ounces (approximately 4 large eggs)
10. Cottage cheese - 8.8 ounces

Track how much protein you are getting over the next 7 days. I am not asking for you to track forever. To get a good idea of what you consistently are consuming and what different portion sizes look like in your life, this activity will really help to inform you beyond the 7 days.

Grams of protein on day 1: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of protein on day 2 \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of protein on day 3: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of protein on day 4: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of protein on day 5 \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of protein on day 6: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of protein on day 7: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

### *Fibre*

The research shows that a person thrives on 15 to 20 grams of fibre per thousand calories consumed. So if you are consuming 2000 calories a day then you should be getting between 30 and 40 grams of fibre daily to thrive.

Aim for lots of vegetables every day. The greater the variety the better. It would be very difficult to overeat multi-coloured vegetables with the exception of potatoes and sweet potatoes.

Track how much fibre you are getting over the next 7 days. I am not asking for you to track forever. To get a good idea of what you consistently are consuming and what different portion sizes look like in your life, this activity will really help to inform you beyond the 7 days.

Grams of fibre on day 1: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of fibre on day 2 \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of fibre on day 3: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of fibre on day 4: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of fibre on day 5 \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of fibre on day 6: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

Grams of fibre on day 7: \_\_\_\_\_ grams

## **Top 5 Slow-Digesting Starchy Carbohydrates**

### **1. Steel-Cut Oats**

- Why it's slow: Minimal processing, high in soluble fiber (especially beta-glucan).
- Benefits: Supports digestion, heart health, and sustained energy.
- Pro tip: Pair with protein or healthy fat to slow digestion even more.

### **2. Sweet Potatoes (with skin)**

- Why it's slow: High in fiber and complex starches, especially when baked.
- Benefits: Rich in vitamins A and C, and stabilizes blood sugar better than white potatoes.
- Best form: Baked or roasted—boiling lowers its glycemic index slightly more.

### 3. Lentils

- Why it's slow: Loaded with fiber, resistant starch, and protein.
- Benefits: Great for gut health and long-lasting fullness.
- Best varieties: Green or brown lentils have a slower release than red.

### 4. Quinoa

- Why it's slow: A whole grain with fiber, protein, and all nine essential amino acids.
- Benefits: Low glycemic impact, complete plant protein, gluten-free.
- Pro tip: Rinse thoroughly before cooking to remove bitterness (saponins).

### 5. Barley (whole or hulled)

- Why it's slow: Exceptionally high in soluble fiber and beta-glucan.
- Benefits: Supports cholesterol reduction and steady blood sugar.
- Avoid: Pearled barley—it's more processed and digests faster.

# **Chapter 7: Movement Without Recovery**

*I was the kid who showed up an hour early to shoot hoops before school. Empty gym, just me and the echo of the ball bouncing off lacquered wood. I'd run suicides until my legs shook, practice free throws until my arms burned, tell myself that this dedication would make me unstoppable.*

*So why was I getting weaker while everyone else got stronger?*

*There's this moment burned into my memory from junior year. We were warming up before a game, and I decided today was the day. I'd been visualizing it for months—my first dunk. My genetics had blessed me with long limbs and a lightweight frame. I'd done the math. At my height, with my wingspan, it should have been easy.*

*I took my steps, planted hard, and launched with everything I had. My fingers grazed the rim's bottom edge, six inches short of jamming. Six fucking inches that might as well have been six feet. I landed awkwardly, trying to play it off like I was just stretching, but everyone saw.*

*Meanwhile, "Joe"—a kid I'd played rep soccer with since middle school—threw down his first dunk that same day. We were the same height. We'd started playing together back when neither of us could touch the net. But while he was becoming explosive, developing that spring in his legs that separated good from great, I was becoming nothing. Just a skinny (not good skinny) kid who tried really hard.*

## **The Schedule of Self-Destruction**

*My training schedule would have impressed anyone who didn't understand recovery. Morning sessions from 6:30 to 7:30, just me in the gym before the janitors finished mopping. School from 8 to 3, where I'd spend every spare moment visualizing plays, studying game film in my head, planning the afternoon's workout.*

*Team practice ran from 3:30 to 5:30—two hours of coaches pushing us through drills, scrimmages, conditioning. But when everyone else headed home, I headed to the weight room. Another hour trying to build muscle that wouldn't come, joints creaking under weight they couldn't support, form breaking down because my stabilizer muscles were made of wet paper.*

*By 7 PM, I'd often be back in the gym for pickup games, running full court until the janitors kicked us out. Four hours of movement every single day, not counting weekend tournaments or summer camps. I was that psycho who did defensive slides in empty gyms, who ran suicides until I puked, who thought suffering equaled progress.*

*But here's what was really happening beneath all that effort: I was an underfed engine running at redline, burning whatever scraps of muscle tissue I had for fuel. Every workout was making me worse, not better, because I was tearing down faster than I could build up. It was like trying to build a house while someone kept stealing the bricks. I needed to invest time in recovery. It didn't even cross my mind to stretch, or do some kind of fascial release, to help my body recover.*

## **The Explosion That Never Came**

*In basketball, you need two types of athleticism. The first is endurance—the ability to run the court for four quarters, to maintain defensive intensity, to be as fresh in the final minutes as you were in the first. I had that in spades. I could run forever, defend full-court press all game, never needed to sub out. Coaches loved my "motor," the way I never stopped moving.*

*But the second type? Explosion? That first deadly step that leaves defenders grabbing air? The vertical leap that turns rebounds into possessions? The burst of speed that creates separation? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.*

*I'd watch game film with the team, and it was like watching myself move through molasses. Same effort as everyone else. Same hustle. Half the speed. In my mind, I was cutting hard, exploding to the basket, elevating for rebounds. On screen, I was moving in slow motion while everyone else operated at normal speed. It was humiliating to see the gap between what I felt and what was actually happening.*

## **The Coordination Catastrophe**

*The malnutrition didn't just steal my strength—it broke the connection between my brain and body. During a crucial game freshman year, we were down by two with thirty seconds left. I'd gotten open on the wing—my spot, where I'd practiced thousands of shots. My teammate saw me, delivered a perfect chest pass. Wide open. Time slowing down. This was my moment.*

*I ducked.*

*Not dodged. Not fumbled. Ducked. Like my brain interpreted "basketball coming toward you" as "danger" instead of "catch this." The ball sailed over my crouched form, out of bounds. The other team got possession, ran out the clock, and we lost. My teammates just stared. The coach benched me for the next two games.*

*This wasn't a one-time thing. It was a pattern my starved nervous system had developed. Passes would bounce off my hands like I was wearing oven mitts. I'd miss layups because my depth perception would randomly fail. My reaction time was so delayed that I'd still be defending where a player was, not where they were. My body was there, but the software running it was glitching from lack of resources.*

## **The Weight Room Humiliation**

*Every day after practice, I'd follow the football players into the weight room. They'd load up the bench press with plate after plate, their thick frames built for moving heavy weight. I'd wait for the rack to clear, strip it down to just the bar and maybe a ten on each side, and struggle through my sets while trying to look like I meant to be lifting light.*

*My joints felt like they were held together with dental floss and hope. Every lift hurt—not the good hurt of muscles working, but the sharp, wrong hurt of connective tissue that couldn't handle the load. No ligament strength. No tendon resilience. Just bones and the prayers that nothing would snap.*

*The football players would bench 225, 250, some pushing 315 pounds. After a full year of daily lifting, I was still struggling to put up 95 pounds for a few shaky reps. My form was textbook—I'd studied every video, read every article. But you can't fortify a building without materials, and my body had nothing to build with.*

*I told myself I just had "bad genetics," that I was built for speed, not strength. The truth was uglier: you can't build muscle when your body has no protein to work with, when every calorie is already spoken for just keeping you upright.*

## **The Seven-Day Leg Day**

*Here's how you know your recovery is completely broken: when leg day cripples you for an entire week. Monday's squats and lunges would leave me wobbling out of the weight room, telling myself the pain meant progress. Tuesday, I'd wake up unable to bend my knees without gasping. Wednesday brought the kind of soreness where sitting on a toilet became an athletic event. Thursday, stairs were my mortal enemy—I'd take the long way around school to avoid them.*

*By Friday, I'd have just enough mobility to convince myself I was recovered. Saturday brought slight improvement, like my muscles were finally considering forgiveness. Sunday, I'd feel almost normal, just in time to destroy myself again on Monday.*

*Other kids would bounce back by Wednesday, ready for their next leg session. Some freaks were fine the next day. Meanwhile, I was planning my week around which days I'd be able to walk normally, dreading the next leg day while forcing myself through it because "champions push through pain."*

*Champions also eat protein and sleep eight hours. I was ignorantly mistaking a whole lot of pain for progress.*

## **Watching Everyone Pass Me By**

*"Joe" became everything I wanted to be. Starting guard on the city's best team. College recruitment letters arriving weekly. Local newspaper articles about his performance. We'd started at the same level back in middle school, transitioning from hours of soccer to hours of basketball.*

*We trained the same hours. Hell, I probably trained more—he had natural talent and a systematic approach to athletics, while I was grinding every single day trying to close the gap. But while he was eating three square meals and sleeping like a normal human, I was living on Sunny D and ice cream. While his body was building muscle from all those training hours, mine was eating itself trying to fuel the next workout.*

*The worst part was the confusion. I blamed myself for being lazy, even though I was working harder than anyone. I blamed my genetics, even though we were built similarly. I blamed my coaches for not giving me the right program, even though we all did the same drills. I blamed everyone and everything except the obvious: you can't build an athlete on a foundation of malnutrition and five hours of sleep.*

## ***The 30-Year-Old Awakening***

*When I finally started eating real food at 30, the changes were almost insulting in how fast they came. Within a month, movements that had always felt awkward suddenly clicked. My body started responding to coaching cues that had bounced off me for years. I could feel actual muscle fibers firing instead of just hoping something would happen.*

*Three months in, my father-in-law noticed my arms at Christmas dinner. "Have you been working out?" he asked. I'd been "working out" for fifteen years. This was the first time anyone had noticed actual muscle. The validation hit harder than any game-winning shot ever could.*

*By the end of year one, I'd gained five pounds of actual muscle. Not the soft weight that comes from overeating, but dense, functional muscle that changed how clothes fit, how I moved, how I felt in my own skin. Year two brought me to 160—breaking through my seemingly permanent 155 for the first time since high school. By year three, I was 175 pounds with visible abs, looking like the athlete I'd always tried to be.*

*Twenty pounds of muscle in three years, after twenty years of nothing. All because I finally gave my body the materials it needed to build with. I finally started consistently challenging my body's capacity throughout each week, multiple times a week. I used a wide variety of movements, classic lifts, one side at a time, calisthenics. It was all fair game as part of the development and learning experience. It didn't have to be crazy heavy anything, or super long anything, I just needed to show-up consistently. With consistency, the rest comes along for the ride.*

## ***The Christmas Tree Test***

*Here's how I measure real strength now: our Christmas tree. It lives in the basement year-round, waiting for its annual journey upstairs. Those first few years of celebrating Christmas, getting that tree up the stairs was an event. I'd wrestle it out of storage, drag it to the stairs, then need to rest. My wife would offer to help, grabbing the top while I struggled with the base. We'd stop halfway so I could catch my breath, humbled about how out of shape I was, finally placing it in the living room like we'd conquered Everest.*

*Now? I throw it over my shoulder like it weighs nothing. One smooth movement from basement to living room, no breaks, no help, no drama. Same tree. Same stairs. Completely different body. The tree didn't get lighter—I got stronger. Real strength, functional strength, built on a foundation of consistent movement, actual nutrition and recovery, not just effort and wishful thinking.*

## **The Truth About Movement**

*You can't out-train malnutrition. You can't build strength on starvation. You can't recover without resources. You will keep on having set backs if you don't train for resiliency. Plan around the risk of overuse. You can't get stronger without a variety of movement that continues to challenge capacity on a monthly and weekly basis. Every rep I did on an empty stomach was destructive, not constructive. Every sprint on dehydrated, tight muscles was tearing down, not building up. Every hour in the gym was making me weaker because I wasn't giving my body the tools to rebuild, and my range of motion was getting worse and worse. With diminished lifestyle choices out of the gym it is much harder to get to your challenging movement and be inspired to feel better than you did the day before.*

*I thought movement was everything. More sport was always better. Rest was for the weak. Pain was just weakness leaving the body. All the classic bro-science bullshit that sounds good on a poster but destroys actual humans.*

*The truth is simpler and harder to accept: movement is just stimulus. Recovery is where the magic happens. The gym doesn't make you stronger—it just creates the conditions for strength. What you do in the other 23 hours determines whether you build or break. Especially as I get older, the recovery efforts, the stretching, the hydration, the protein, fibre, sleep. It all matters, it adds up, and your body tells the story.*

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*Next, I'll show you how spending life indoors—especially during Canadian winters—slowly drained my energy, and why getting outside wasn't just about fresh air, it was about survival.*

**Activity Journal for the week starting:\_\_\_\_\_.** And  
**Ending:\_\_\_\_\_**

During the last 7 days, how many days did you exceed 8000 steps? Number of days:\_\_\_\_\_

During the last 7 days, how many days did you set a timer to remind you to reset your posture and get into better positioning throughout the day? Number of days:\_\_\_\_\_

During the last 7 days, how many days did you complete one set, or more, of very challenging resistance training? Number of days:\_\_\_\_\_

During the last 7 days, how many days did you complete cardio vascular physical activity for 25 minutes or longer per day? Number of days:\_\_\_\_\_

During the last 7 days, how many days did you stretch for 10 minutes or longer during each day? Number of days: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 8: The Indoor Prison

Nine months. That's how long my cough lasted when I was about 8 years old. It started in October with a little tickle in my throat, the kind you ignore because it's just another cold. By December, I was hacking so hard my ribs hurt. January brought wheezing that kept me up at night. February, March, April—the cough became part of my identity, like my height or my shitty diet.

My parents tried everything. Cough syrup that tasted like cherry-flavored motor oil. Inhalers that made my heart race. Doctor visits where they'd listen to my lungs and declare "seasonal asthma" before sending us home with another prescription that didn't work.

It wasn't asthma. It was what happens when you spend October through April living like a vampire in Canada, existing on artificial light and recycled air while your immune system slowly surrenders.

## The Canadian Cave Dweller's Calendar

In southern Ontario, winter isn't just a season—it's a lifestyle prison that can start creeping in around Halloween. The jack-o'-lanterns barely have time to rot before the world goes grey. By November, you're leaving for school in darkness and coming home in darkness. The sun becomes a rumor, something that supposedly exists between 9 AM and 4 PM while you're trapped inside.

The cold isn't just uncomfortable—it's aggressive. Minus twenty Celsius feels like nature personally hates you. Your face hurts. Your lungs burn. The walk from the house to the car becomes an Olympic event. So you stop going outside unless absolutely necessary.

My solution was elegant in its stupidity: if outside sucks, keep the distractions indoors, and never go outside.

Why brave the frozen hellscape when basement warmth beckoned? My hobbies were all conveniently indoor-friendly. Collectible card games don't require sunlight. Video games run twenty-four seven regardless of weather. Books read the same in a bunker as they do in a park, let's not forget basketball, the identity I wanted to thrive in, still with no windows in every school gym I visited.

From October to April—six full months—I lived like a well-fed mole. School, home, basement, bed, repeat. Weekends meant longer basement sessions, not outdoor adventures. Even basketball, my supposed athletic outlet, happened in climate-controlled gyms where the sun was just a logo on someone's jersey.

## The Hobby Dungeons

My teen job at the mall hobby store should have been a red flag. Zero windows. Fluorescent lights that hummed like dying insects. Air that smelled like a mixture of new plastic and body odour. Eight-hour shifts selling trading cards to other pale kids who'd emerge blinking into the mall's slightly-less-artificial light. Don't get me wrong, these can be great games, I just didn't have a moderation switch.

But I loved it. Here were my people—fellow cave dwellers who understood that natural light was overrated when you could be discussing the meta-game or trading rare cards. We'd finish our shifts and head straight to someone's basement for eight-hour card tournaments, trading one windowless box for another.

Even when I became a fitness professional, supposedly dedicated to health and wellness, I managed to find the most dungeon-like spaces to work in. A gym in a mall basement. No windows, just mirrors reflecting the same fluorescent, artificial light, I'd grown up under. Teaching people about health while slowly dying from lack of sunlight—the irony wasn't lost on me, I just didn't care enough to change it.

## The Sickness That Wouldn't Leave

That nine-month cough became my winter companion. It started gentle, almost polite. A little clearing of the throat during my morning routine to go to school. By November, it had moved in permanently. December brought the deep chest rattling that made teachers move me to the back of class. January's soundtrack was me trying to muffle coughs during math lessons.

My parents dragged me to doctor after doctor. Each one listened to my lungs, prescribed something new, and sent us away. Antibiotics that did nothing. Inhalers that made me jittery but still coughing. Cough syrups that might as well have been colored water.

By March, the cough was just part of who I was. "Oh, that's just Alain," people would say. "He's got that asthma thing." Except it wasn't asthma. My lungs were fine. My immune system,

however, was running on fumes. Vitamin D deficiency had turned my body into a welcome mat for every virus in Ontario.

The pattern repeated most winters. October would bring the first cold that wouldn't quite go away. November added a second layer. By December, I was a walking petri dish. January through March was survival mode. Then, miraculously, when spring arrived and I started playing outdoor sports again, the coughs would fade.

Did I connect this to sunlight and the benefits to being outdoors? Did I think maybe—just maybe—spending six months indoors was making me sick? Of course not. I blamed genetics, bad luck, "seasonal asthma," anything but my vampire lifestyle.

My happy place was attending and working at Summer Camps. I didn't even stop to compare how I was thriving in the Summer versus my Winter lifestyle. I just assumed that everyone had the same experience. Isn't that the shame though, that so many of us assume that we have to feel worse when it gets cold outside.

## **The Adrenaline Substitute**

Here's what nobody tells you about chronic vitamin D deficiency: your body finds workarounds. Mine chose adrenaline and dopamine as substitute energy sources. Video games, card games, heck, any type of competition wasn't just entertainment—they were my battery pack. The constant stimulation, the little hits of achievement, the artificial excitement of completing quests or winning matches. It masked how depleted I actually was.

Without games, I was a zombie stumbling through life. With them, I could pretend I had energy. Sure, it was fake energy—borrowed from tomorrow's exhaustion, propped up by stress hormones—but it felt better than admitting I was accomplishing very little.

The games had to get progressively more intense to provide the same hit. Casual games became competitive games became all-night gaming until my head or eyes started to hurt. My body was screaming for real energy from real sunlight, and I was feeding it garbage, with zero fulfilment instead.

## **The Summer Awakening**

Every summer, something magical happened that I was too dense to understand: I became human again. The outdoor basketball courts called. Soccer fields opened up. The backyard pool beckoned. Suddenly I had energy that didn't require a power outlet. My coughs disappeared like snow in July. My mood lifted without needing to level up or win matches.

I'd spend hours outside, playing pickup basketball until the streetlights came on, swimming until my fingers pruned, feeling alive in a way that no game could replicate. Working outdoors at

Sports Camps all day everyday each Summer for 5 Summers. My body soaked up the sun like a dying plant finally getting water.

Did I make the connection? Did I think "wow, being outside makes me feel amazing, maybe I should do this year-round?" Of course not. I thought it was just about being active, about sports, about summer vacation vibes. The thought that maybe—just maybe—the giant ball of fire in the sky was important for human health never crossed my mind.

Then October would creep back in, and I'd retreat to my cave without question, wondering why I felt like shit again by December. The pattern repeated for over a decade, and I never once connected the dots. Everyone goes through the same cycle in Canada right?

## The Allergy Excuse

"I have seasonal allergies" became my get-out-of-nature-free card. And honestly, I did. Hayfever hit me hard. Itchy eyes, runny nose, sneezing fits around certain plants. But instead of managing it—taking an antihistamine, building tolerance, finding ways to enjoy the outdoors despite it—I used it as permission to stay inside, in my early childhood years.

My parents would drag me camping as a kid, and I treated it like prison. Why sit by a fire when you could be reading comics? Why hike when you could be organizing your next role playing game? Why exist in nature when civilization had invented screens? Every camping trip was torture, not because nature was actually bad, but because it pulled me away from my dopamine dealers. No TV meant no cartoons. No electricity meant no games. No walls meant no escape from the boring reality of just... existing.

I'd spend entire camping trips counting down the hours until we could go home, until I could plug back into the matrix of indoor entertainment. The fresh air that my parents raved about? It just smelled like I was missing something better inside. Ironic that as I spent more time outdoors the allergies passed. Interesting anecdote, for a long time the medical establishment encouraged young children to stay away from peanut butter due to the risk of allergies. That same cohort of young people had more allergies to peanut butter than ever before. An ironic coincidence.

## The Transformation Tools

At 30, finally aware that I was a shadow of my potential self while stuck indoors, I started experimenting with ways to reconnect with the outside world—or at least simulate it. The grounding mat sounds like complete hippie bullshit, I know. It's basically a mat that supposedly connects you to the earth's electrical field. But standing on it while working actually helped with my morning headaches, even better is when I keep it at the foot of our bed, under our calves or feet. Was it placebo? Maybe. But my headaches didn't care about the mechanism—they just stopped.

The cold showers became my favorite hack. Every shower now ends with two-plus minutes of full cold while I do box breathing. I turn to face north, do a full four-count breath cycle. Turn east, another cycle. South, west, repeat. By the time I step out, I feel like I've mainlined espresso without the jitters or crash. It's like a reset button for my nervous system, shocking it awake in a way that no amount of caffeine ever could.

But the real game-changer was simply moving my work outside when possible. Summer client sessions in the backyard versus winter sessions in the basement—same exercises, same conversations, completely different energy. Under the sun, I could train clients all day and feel energized. In the basement, three sessions and I wanted a nap.

## The Cost of Comfort

Every winter I spent indoors was a withdrawal from my health bank account that I didn't realize I was making. My immune system degraded from fortress to tissue paper. My energy became dependent on artificial stimulation. My mood needed constant digital props to stay afloat. My connections to other humans stayed surface-level, mediated by shared hobbies rather than real presence.

I thought I was being smart, avoiding discomfort, maximizing my hobby time. I was actually choosing a different discomfort: the slow, creeping drain of living like a houseplant. A well-fed, entertained houseplant, but a houseplant nonetheless.

The real tragedy is how easy the fix was. Ten minutes outside. A walk around the block. Morning coffee on the porch even when it's cold. Standing in the backyard and just breathing real air. These weren't huge lifestyle changes—they were tiny adjustments that paid massive dividends.

But for twenty-plus years, I couldn't be bothered. The comfort of indoor life, the reliability of artificial environments, the control over temperature and stimulation—it all seemed more valuable than the mysterious benefits of fresh air and sunlight.

I was wrong. So wrong. And my nine-month cough was just my body's way of trying to tell me what I was too stubborn to hear: humans weren't designed to live in boxes, no matter how comfortable we make them.

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*Next, I'll show you how anxiety ran my life for 40 years without me knowing it, and why video games and sports weren't hobbies—they were medication for a mind that couldn't stop racing.*

## Weekly Environment Habits Tracking Tool

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_ | Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions:

Each day, check off the environmental behaviors you completed. Use the notes section for anything you observed or felt throughout the week. The goal is awareness, consistency, and small improvements over time.

| Day       | Spent 10+ min outside | Morning daylight exposure (before 10am) | Watched the sunset or evening light | Went barefoot outside (or used grounding mat) | Used heat (sauna/hot bath) or cold (cold shower/expo mat) | Created a quiet, relaxing indoor space |
|-----------|-----------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Monday    | [ ]                   | [ ]                                     | [ ]                                 | [ ]   | [ ]   | [ ]                                    |
| Tuesday   | [ ]                   | [ ]                                     | [ ]                                 | [ ]   | [ ]   | [ ]                                    |
| Wednesday | [ ]                   | [ ]                                     | [ ]                                 | [ ]   | [ ]   | [ ]                                    |
| Thursday  | [ ]                   | [ ]                                     | [ ]                                 | [ ]   | [ ]   | [ ]                                    |
| Friday    | [ ]                   | [ ]                                     | [ ]                                 | [ ]   | [ ]   | [ ]                                    |
| Saturday  | [ ]                   | [ ]                                     | [ ]                                 | [ ]   | [ ]   | [ ]                                    |
| Sunday    | [ ]                   | [ ]                                     | [ ]                                 | [ ]   | [ ]   | [ ]                                    |

Weekly Reflection Questions:

1. Which environmental habits did you complete most consistently this week?



2. Did you notice any impact on your energy, mood, or focus?
  -
3. What will you aim to improve or maintain next week?
  -

## Chapter 9: The Anxious Achiever's Trap

I was 42 years old, trying to figure out how we could keep up with all the commitments. It was my fault, I just wanted so many things, all at the same time. So once I had them, it meant keeping up with all of it.

That's when it hit me. This wasn't normal worry. This was something else. Something that had been there my whole life, disguised as ambition, drive, perfectionism. I'd been anxious for four decades without knowing that's what it was.

### The Perfect Cover Story

Anxiety is clever. It doesn't always show up as panic attacks or obvious fear of the future. Sometimes it dresses itself up as positive traits. Mine wore the costume of a high achiever. The kid who needed straight A's not because I loved learning, but because anything less meant I wasn't smart enough, and my fear of judgement was real. The athlete who trained four hours a day not just to improve, but to prove I deserved to exist in that space. The professional who needed to know everything about fitness because admitting ignorance felt like admitting failure.

For 40 years, I thought I was driven. Turned out I was just scared.

Looking back, the signs were everywhere. The way I'd put off sleep, finding one more thing to do before bed because lying in darkness meant being alone with my thoughts. The compulsive checking to make sure everything was ok with everyone around me, as if asking one more time would somehow control the outcome. The constant fear of scarcity that had me grinding every day, not from healthy ambition but from the terror that if I stopped moving, everything would collapse.

### The Achievement Addiction

When I was 16 and tore my ACL, it wasn't just my knee that shattered. My entire identity—built on being an athlete, on having that one thing I was good at—crumbled. Without basketball and

soccer at the highest level, who was I? Just another kid who wasn't particularly good at anything.

So I pivoted to shooting the ball as many times as possible while my knee recovered and hobbies to distract my frustration from my inability to run at any real pace. Not casually, but with the same obsessive intensity I'd brought to my conditioning prior to that. I needed to be the best at something, anything, to justify my existence. When that wasn't enough, I'd add another hobby, another game, another way to achieve and accomplish and prove I mattered.

School responsibilities? Those got avoided because they came with the risk of failure, and consistently being told that I could do better. Better to not try and preserve the illusion of potential than to try and confirm I was average. I'd skip studying to organize my hobby cards, then wonder why I felt constantly behind and overwhelmed.

## The Know-It-All Defense

As a fitness professional, my anxiety found a new costume: expertise. I needed to have the answer to everything. Client asks about a supplement I'd never heard of? I'd bullshit my way through rather than admit ignorance. Question about a training method I didn't understand? I'd deflect with confident-sounding nonsense rather than say those three terrifying words: "I don't know."

It took until my late 30s to realize that "I don't know, but I'm looking forward to learning more about that" was a sign of strength, not weakness. That real confidence meant being comfortable with not having all the answers. That my clients didn't need a perfect robot—they needed a human who was still learning too.

But for decades, the anxiety convinced me that any crack in the armor of expertise would reveal me as the fraud I believed I was.

## The Physical Tax

Anxiety doesn't just live in your mind—it sets up shop in your body. The tension headaches that would start at the base of my skull and wrap around like a vice. The way my shoulders lived up near my ears, constantly braced for impact.

Before I understood what anxiety was, I thought everyone lived this way. Didn't everyone lie awake recalculating their budget for the fifteenth time? Didn't everyone's jaw hurt from unconscious clenching? Didn't everyone feel like they were constantly one mistake away from everything falling apart?

The hyperventilating at soccer camp when I was 12? That wasn't just about losing a game. That was anxiety finding a crack in my armor and exploding outward. The IBS that destroyed my

teens and twenties? Anxiety lives in the gut, and mine was constantly in knots. The need to control everything—my diet, my training, my image—all anxiety wearing different masks.

## The Distraction Solution

This is the big thing about anxiety that nobody talks about: it creates an overwhelming desire to fill up the present with distractions. Sports, video games, hobby cards, achievement hunting—they weren't hobbies. They were medication. They were ways to avoid sitting with the discomfort of just being.

When you're focused on completing a quest in a video game, you're not thinking about whether you're good enough. When you're in the middle of an intense basketball game, the anxiety can't reach you. When you're organizing your collectible cards for the hundredth time, you're in control of something.

But the relief is temporary. The game ends. The cards get sorted. And the anxiety is right there waiting, often stronger for having been ignored. So you need another hit. Another game. Another achievement. Another way to prove you're okay.

## The Turning Point

When the pressure of all those metaphorical balls in the air hit, my usual coping mechanisms stopped working. I couldn't exercise my way out of interest rate hikes. I couldn't game my way through cash flow problems. The anxiety, stripped of its usual outlets, stood naked and obvious for the first time.

So I did something I'd never done before: I addressed it directly.

First, I cut out coffee. The caffeine that I thought was giving me energy was actually just adding jet fuel to the anxiety fire. The jittery alertness I'd mistaken for productivity was just chemically enhanced worry.

Then I got serious about sleep. Real sleep. Eight hours of actual rest, not the five hours of unconsciousness I'd been calling sleep. When you're properly rested, problems feel manageable. When you're exhausted, everything feels like a crisis. I don't always get those eight hours. But I appreciate them so much when I do, and I know I'm not at best with anything less.

I started meditating. Not the "empty your mind" bullshit that hasn't worked for me yet, but simple breathing exercises that gave my nervous system permission to calm down. Box breathing became my anchor. Four counts in, hold, four out, hold. Repeat until the chest-tightness loosened.

Exercise became intentional instead of obsessive. 45 hard sets spread across seven days, focused on building strength rather than burning off anxiety. Movement as medicine, not escape.

## The Present Moment

Here's what changed when I finally addressed the anxiety I'd carried for 40 years: I became present. Actually present. Not physically there while mentally calculating, worrying, planning, fearing. But fully there.

Conversations with the people I loved stopped being opportunities to half-listen while my brain ran numbers. Time with my kids became actual time with my kids, not just physical supervision while I mentally reviewed client schedules. Client sessions transformed from performances where I had to prove my expertise into genuine connections where I could actually help.

The pressure of keeping up with everything didn't disappear. The mortgage payments still came due. But without anxiety amplifying everything into a crisis, I could actually think clearly enough to address problems rather than just worry about them.

## The Hidden Cost

For 40 years, anxiety had been stealing from me. Not dramatically, but consistently. A little presence here, a little peace there. Moments with my family where I was physically present but mentally absent. Opportunities missed because I was too busy managing worry to see them. Relationships kept at surface level because real connection required vulnerability I couldn't risk.

I'd built an entire life around managing anxiety I didn't know I had. The achievements, the habits, the routines—all designed to keep the worry at bay without ever addressing its source. It worked, sort of. I survived. I even succeeded by several measures. But I could have thrived as so much more.

## Your Hidden Anxiety

If you're reading this thinking "I'm not anxious, I'm just driven," let me ask you: When was the last time you sat still without distraction and felt completely at peace? When did you last admit ignorance without shame? When did you stop checking—your phone, your bank account, your appearance, your performance—and just exist?

Anxiety doesn't always look like panic attacks. Sometimes it looks like perfectionism. Sometimes it looks like workaholism. Sometimes it looks like needing to be the best at something, anything, to feel worthy of taking up space.

The good news? Once you see it, you can address it. Not through more achievement or better distraction, but through the simple practices that actually calm your nervous system. Sleep.

Effective breathing. Movement. Presence. The same things that fixed my body also can also heal my mind.

Because it turns out, you can't separate the two. An anxious mind lives in a tense body. A calm body houses a peaceful mind. And after 40 years of unconscious anxiety, I finally understand what peace feels like.

It feels like coming home.

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*Next, I'll show you how all these pieces came together—how fixing one pillar made the others easier, and why the journey from broken to whole wasn't about perfection, but about finally being honest with myself.*

## Weekly Mindfulness Habits Tracking Tool

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_ | Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions:

Each day, check off the mindfulness habits you completed. These are short, low-effort actions that build awareness, presence, and emotional regulation. Use the reflection space to track progress and patterns.

| Day       | Practiced gratitude (3 things) | Set a daily intention or goal | Meditated or focused on breath (5+ min) | Journaled (even 3–5 sentences) | Recognized and named an emotion |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Monday    | [ ]                            | [ ]                           | [ ]                                     | [ ]                            | [ ]                             |
| Tuesday   | [ ]                            | [ ]                           | [ ]                                     | [ ]                            | [ ]                             |
| Wednesday | [ ]                            | [ ]                           | [ ]                                     | [ ]                            | [ ]                             |
| Thursday  | [ ]                            | [ ]                           | [ ]                                     | [ ]                            | [ ]                             |
| Friday    | [ ]                            | [ ]                           | [ ]                                     | [ ]                            | [ ]                             |

Saturday      [ ]      [ ]      [ ]      [ ]

Sunday      [ ]      [ ]      [ ]      [ ]

#### Weekly Reflection Questions:

1. Which mindfulness practice helped you the most this week?
  -
2. When did you feel most grounded, present, or calm?
  -
3. What's one small shift you can carry into next week?
  -

## Chapter 10: Your 30-Day Foundation

I'm going to tell you something that would have pissed off my younger self: you don't need to fix everything at once. In fact, trying to overhaul your entire life in one heroic effort is exactly how you guarantee failure. Trust me, I tried that approach for twenty years.

Here's what actually works: one small habit from each pillar, practiced consistently for 30 days. Not perfect practice. Not Olympic-level dedication. Just showing up every day and doing something slightly better than yesterday.

### The Foundation That Changed Everything

When I finally got serious about my health at 30, I didn't start with a complex system. I started with what I could actually do while working full-time, raising two kids, and trying to keep up with all those commitments. The habits had to be simple enough to do on my worst days and effective enough to matter.

After years of trial and error—mostly error—here's the foundation that actually stuck:

**Breathing: Nasal only during the day** This one costs zero time because you're breathing anyway. Just close your mouth. Breathe through your nose while working, walking, even during light exercise. When I started, I could barely make it ten minutes without gasping through my mouth. By day 30, nasal breathing was automatic. My sleep improved because I wasn't

mouth-breathing all night. My anxiety dropped because my nervous system wasn't in constant panic mode from overbreathing, into the smallest parts of my lungs.

**Sleep: Same wake time every single day** Not same bedtime—same wake time. Plus or minus 10 minutes, seven days a week. Find a time that you can consistently do year round. It doesn't have to be perfect, but the goal is to be able to get back to that time after any one missed day. No sleeping in on weekends. No "just five more minutes." This one habit fixed my sleep more than any supplement or hack ever could. Your body adjusts your tiredness to match your wake time. Stay consistent, and you'll naturally get sleepy at the right time. Fight it with weekend sleep-ins, and you'll spend your life jet-lagged in your own time zone.

**Hydration: Full glass of water before anything else** Before coffee. Before phone. Before the chaos of the day begins. One full glass of water, chugged while the coffee brews. You've just gone 7-8 hours without hydration. Your brain is literally shrunken from dehydration. That morning fog? It's not just tiredness—it's your neurons struggling to fire without adequate fluid. This one glass won't fix chronic dehydration, but it starts every day with momentum in the right direction.

**Nutrition: 30 grams of protein at breakfast** Not a protein bar that's basically a candy bar with marketing. Real protein. Eggs. Greek yogurt. A proper protein shake. Whatever works, but get 30 grams minimum. This killed my mid-morning cravings, stabilized my energy, and started the muscle-building process early. When you front-load protein, you're less likely to binge on garbage later because your body has what it actually needs.

**Movement: 15 squats or 20 pushups before morning shower** Not a workout. Not a gym session. Just 15 bodyweight squats while the shower heats up. Takes 30 seconds. But it wakes up your largest muscle groups, gets blood flowing, and reminds your body that it's meant to move. Some days those 15 squats turned into 20, then some pushups, then a full workout. But even on shit days, I did my 15 squats. Movement creates momentum.

**Environment: 10 minutes of sunlight before 10 AM** Coffee on the porch. Walk around the block. Stand in the driveway like a weirdo—I don't care how you do it. But get actual sunlight on your actual skin before 10 AM. This sets your circadian rhythm, boosts vitamin D production, and gives you energy that coffee can't match. In Canadian winters, this meant bundling up for five minutes of frozen sunshine. Still worth it. In the absence of going outdoors, maybe try some red light instead. Get it to shine right on your face.

**Mindfulness: Three gratitudes before bed** Not a journal. Not an essay. Just three things you're grateful for, said out loud or written in your phone. Takes 60 seconds. But it rewires your brain to notice good things instead of cataloging problems. After 30 days of this, I stopped waking up with anxiety about my to-do list and started waking up curious about what good things might happen.

## Why These Seven Work

Each habit takes less than 5 minutes. Most take less than 1 minute. But together, they create a compound effect that transforms everything:

The nasal breathing calms your nervous system, which helps you sleep better. Better sleep gives you energy to move. Movement makes you thirsty, so you drink more water. I have several clients who seem to refuse to drink water throughout the day, but are then magically starved of thirst and drink 2-litres during their workout. Proper hydration helps you absorb the protein at breakfast. The protein stabilizes your blood sugar, reducing cravings. Less cravings means better food choices. Proper light in the morning helps you sleep better at night. Gratitude practice reduces the anxiety that used to keep you up.

It's a positive spiral instead of the negative one I'd been stuck in for decades. What kind of spiral are you working on right now?

## The 30-Day Reality Check

Here's what the first 30 days actually looked like for me:

**Days 1-3: Honeymoon phase** Everything felt easy. I was motivated. I was going to transform my life. I did extra reps, drank extra water, felt like a health guru. This is the dangerous phase because you think it'll always feel this easy.

**Days 4-10: The resistance** My body started fighting back. Waking early on Saturday felt like punishment. The squats were boring. Water was annoying. My nose felt stuffed from trying to breathe through it. This is where most people quit, deciding the habits are "not for them."

**Days 11-20: The negotiation** My brain tried every trick to sabotage me. "You've been good all week, sleep in just this once." "Protein powder is expensive, just have toast." "It's cloudy, sunlight doesn't count today." This is where you learn that motivation is bullshit—discipline is what matters.

**Days 21-30: The shift** Something clicked. The habits stopped feeling like things I had to do and became things I just did. Like brushing teeth or putting on shoes. The resistance faded because the habits were now part of my identity, not impositions on it.

## Your Personal Prescription

I'm not saying copy my exact habits. I'm saying pick one from each pillar that you can actually do. Maybe yours looks like:

- 5 deep breaths through your nose when you wake up
- No phone 30 minutes before bed
- Water bottle on your desk you have to finish twice a day
- Vegetables or fruits at every meal

- Walk to get coffee instead of driving
- Eat lunch outside
- Write one thing you're proud of each day

The specifics matter less than the consistency. Pick habits so simple you can do them hungover, sick, or exhausted. Because those are the days that actually count.

## The Multiplier Effect

Here's what nobody tells you about habit stacking: success in one area makes success in others easier. When I started breathing better, I had more energy to exercise. When I exercised, I slept better. When I slept better, I made better food choices. When I ate better, I had more mental clarity. When my mind was clear, I could actually be present with my family.

It wasn't about being perfect. It was about being 1% better consistently. Those 1% improvements compound faster than you think. After 30 days of tiny changes, I felt better than I had after years of extreme efforts that never lasted.

## The Truth About Transformation

Transformation isn't a montage. It's not a dramatic before-and-after photo. It's a thousand tiny wins that slowly add up to a different life. It's choosing water over soda 30 times until water becomes your default. It's doing squats or pushups 30 mornings until not doing them feels weird. It's breathing through your nose enough times that mouth-breathing feels suffocating.

The younger me wanted a complete overhaul, a total rebirth, a phoenix-from-the-ashes story. What I got instead was much less dramatic but infinitely more valuable: sustainable change that actually lasted.

## Your 30-Day Challenge

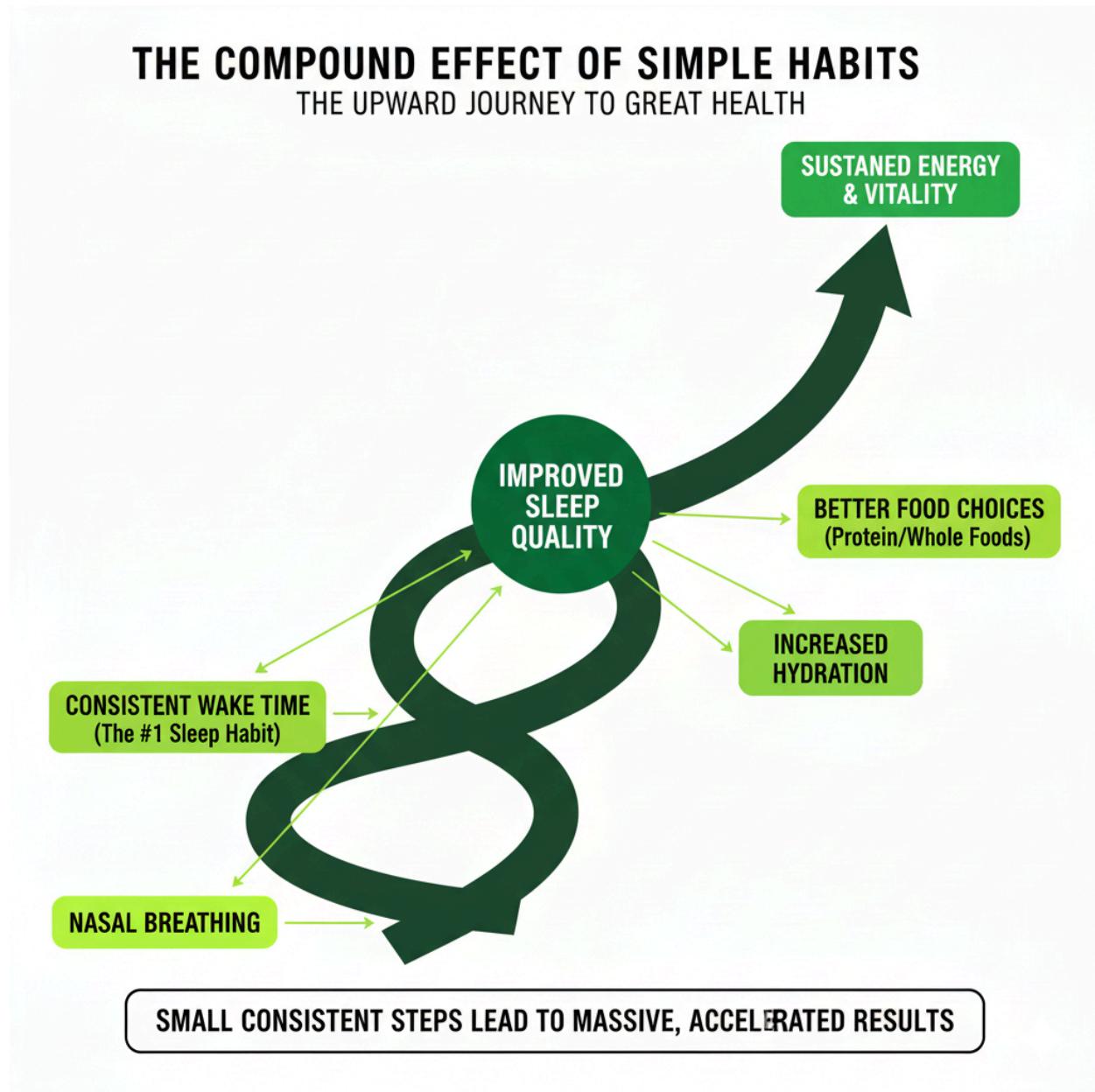
Don't wait for Monday. Don't wait for the new year. Don't wait for life to be less stressful. Start right now with these seven habits. Not perfect execution—just execution. Track them however works—phone notes, paper calendar, check marks on your mirror.

After 30 days, some habits will stick and others won't. Keep what works, modify what doesn't, but maintain the structure. Seven pillars, seven habits, every single day.

Because here's the secret: it's not about the habits themselves. It's about proving to yourself that you can change. Once you believe that—once you have evidence that you're capable of transformation—everything else becomes possible.

The hardest part isn't the squats or the water or the early wake time. The hardest part is believing you're worth the effort.

You are. Start now. Thirty days from now, you'll thank yourself.



Next, I'll show you the tracking systems that actually work for real humans with real lives, and why the best system is the one you'll actually use.

# Chapter 11: The Tracking That Actually Works

Let me save you three years of downloading fitness apps: generic app don't work. Not because they're badly designed, but because automated reminders from robots have zero emotional weight. Your phone buzzes, tells you to log your lunch, and you swipe it away like every other notification. Two weeks later, you delete the app and pretend you never downloaded it.

I know because I tried them all. MyFitnessPal, the fancy scale app that promised to revolutionize my health, the workout trackers with their cheerful notifications. They all failed for the same reason: there's no accountability to a machine. No emotional connection to a spreadsheet. No real consequence to lying to an algorithm about what you ate.

Here's what actually works, and it's stupidly simple: boundaries you don't have to think about and humans you don't want to disappoint.

## The Power of Binary Decisions

The best tracking system I ever found wasn't a system at all—it was elimination. Instead of tracking every calorie, I created hard rules that removed decisions entirely:

**Intermittent fasting: 11:30 AM to 7:30 PM eating window** No tracking required. Clock says 11:29? Don't eat. Clock says 7:31? Kitchen's closed. Binary. Simple. No decision fatigue about whether that snack "counts" or if you're "really hungry." The clock decides, not your cravings.

**Cut the obvious garbage** Anything made with flour? Gone. Candy? Deleted. Liquid calories? Extinct. I didn't need to track the nutritional content of foods that shouldn't exist in my kitchen. Taking them out of the house really works.. I'm super biased if I am rationalizing some "good reason" for keep chips in the house. This wasn't about perfection—I'd still eat cake at birthday parties. But day-to-day, these foods simply weren't options.

The beauty of elimination is that there's nothing to track. You either did or didn't eat within your window. You either did or didn't buy refined carb based foods. Success becomes binary, not a complex calculation of points or macros or calories.

## The Picture Method That Changed Everything

For my clients who needed more structure, we found something that actually stuck: food photos. Not for Instagram. Not for likes. Just a simple picture of everything they ate, sent to me or saved in a folder.

This works because:

- It takes 3 seconds (everyone has 3 seconds)
- Phones are always there (unlike tracking journals)
- Pictures don't lie (that "small" portion looks huge in photos)
- Someone else seeing it matters (even if they don't judge)

My clients would literally just snap a photo and text it. No logging, no measuring, no calculating. But the act of knowing someone would see it—that their coach would know they had McDonald's for the third time this week—created real accountability.

## The Exercise Sets That Matter

While I kept nutrition simple, I tracked exercise religiously. Not every rep, not every weight, just one number: sets per week. My target was a minimum 30 hard sets, across 7 days a week. That's it.

A "set" meant pushing close to failure. Three sets of squats? That counts as three. Twenty minutes on the treadmill? That's zero—cardio\* wasn't what I was tracking. This simplicity meant I could track it in my head. Monday: 3 sets. Tuesday: 3 sets. By Friday, I knew if I'd hit my target or not.

No apps. No journals. Just awareness of a single number that actually mattered for building muscle and maintaining strength.

\*Cardio is great. Don't get me wrong. It is super important. Heart disease is the number one killer. No doubt. But if you work hard enough against some kind of resistance, your heart rate will go up regardless. I have worked with clients who have all kinds of heart health issues. We have to be very careful with our resistance sets because of the potential strain on the heart. We monitor within doctor recommended guidelines the whole workout.

## The Public Declaration

Here's where it gets uncomfortable: all my lifestyle choices were public. My family knew about the intermittent fasting. My clients knew about my protein targets. My friends knew I didn't eat flour-based foods. Not because I preached about it—God, there's nothing worse than the newly converted health nut who won't shut up—but because living publicly creates accountability.

When someone offers you a donut at 10 AM and you say "I don't eat until 11:30," you've just created a witness. When your kids see you doing pushups while coffee brews, you've modeled behavior without saying a word. When your wife knows you're trying to hit 100 grams of protein daily, she might mention the leftover tofu in the fridge.

But here's the crucial part: I never pushed this on anyone. My wife didn't need to follow my eating window. My kids could have their cereal whenever they wanted. I was their dad and husband, not their coach. Leading by example only works when you're not a preachy asshole about it.

## The Balance of Real Life

The biggest tracking mistake people make is forgetting that life exists. Birthdays happen. Date nights matter. Vacations aren't supposed to be macro-counting expeditions. So I built balance into the system:

Social events? No tracking. No fasting windows. No refusing cake at my kid's party because "I don't eat flour." Those moments matter more than perfect adherence to any system.

But here's the key: these were exceptions, not the rule. Weekend cottage trips didn't mean abandoning everything—I'd still sneak in pushups to start the day, swim hard enough to feel it the next day. Not because I had to track it, but because movement felt good when it wasn't an obligation.

## The Evolution of Need

When I first started intermittent fasting, I watched the clock obsessively. 11:29 AM felt like torture when I was hungry at 11:15. But after a month, something shifted. I stopped needing to track because the behavior had become automatic.

The same thing happened with protein. First month: obsessive calculation. Second month: rough estimates. By month three: intuitive understanding of what 100 grams looked like across a day. The tracking scaffolding fell away because the behavior had solidified.

This is the goal of any tracking system: to make itself obsolete. If you're tracking the same things after a year that you were on day one, the system has failed. Good tracking teaches you what success feels like so you don't need to track anymore.

## The Non-Negotiables That Stuck

After all the experiments, five things earned permanent tracking status in my life:

1. **Exercise sets per week** (still count these mentally)

2. **Fasting window** (though it's automatic now)
3. **Daily protein** (intuitive but aware)
4. **Water intake** (3+ liters, tracked by bottle refills)
5. **Sleep consistency** (same wake time, no tracking needed)

Notice what's not there? Calories. Steps. Heart rate zones. Body measurements. Weight. All the stuff fitness influencers obsess over while missing the basics that actually matter.

## Your Minimum Viable Tracking

Here's your assignment: pick the simplest tracking method that creates awareness without overwhelm. Maybe it's:

- A paper calendar with X's for workout days
- Photos of meals sent to a friend
- A note in your phone with protein estimates
- Marks on your water bottle for refills
- A buddy who texts "gym?" every morning

The method matters less than these principles:

- It must take less than 30 seconds
- It must create real accountability
- It must be harder to skip than to do
- It must work on your worst days

Because here's the truth: the best tracking system is the one you actually use. Not the perfect one. Not the comprehensive one. Not the one that would impress a data scientist. The one that gets you to drink more water, eat more protein, and move your body consistently.

Everything else is just expensive procrastination disguised as optimization.

If you are having trouble consistently doing these things on your own, maybe its time you send an email ([info@growyourmusclesstudio.com](mailto:info@growyourmusclesstudio.com)) to me, and we talk about some tailored solutions and accountability just for you.

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*Next, I'll show you what happens when you inevitably fall off track—because you will—and why getting back on is the only skill that actually matters for long-term success.*

# Final Author's Note: The Life You're Actually Chasing

I need to tell you something about that Christmas tree.

You know, the one I can now throw over my shoulder and carry upstairs without breaking a sweat. The same tree that used to require rest breaks, help from my wife, and a recovery period after finally getting it in place.

That tree hasn't changed. It weighs the same 40 pounds it always did. What changed was me—20 pounds of muscle, proper nutrition, actual sleep, and a body that finally works the way it's supposed to. But here's what matters: I don't carry that tree to impress anyone. I don't even think about it as an achievement anymore. It's just... normal.

That's what this whole journey has really been about. Not the six-pack abs that showed up around year two. Not the migraines that disappeared. Not even the IBS that ruled my life for decades finally going quiet. It's about normal things becoming easy. Automatic. Unremarkable.

## What Success Actually Looks Like

When I started this journey at 30, I thought success would be dramatic. I imagined myself as some fitness influencer type, posting shirtless photos and preaching about optimization. I thought I'd become one of those people who talks about their workouts at parties and judges other people's food choices.

Thank God I was wrong.

Real success is quieter. It's waking up without an alarm because your body actually got enough sleep. It's your children asking you to play and having the energy to say yes. It's sitting through a movie without your stomach cramping. It's forgetting when you last had a headache because they've become so rare.

Success is my wife no longer asking "how are you feeling?" with that worried look. It's my kids never knowing the version of me that was always exhausted, always in the bathroom, always saying "maybe later." It's being present for the life I worked so hard to build instead of just surviving it.

## The Compound Effect of Not Feeling Like Shit

Here's what nobody tells you about getting healthy: the benefits compound in ways you can't imagine when you're stuck in the struggle. When you fix your breathing, your sleep improves. When your sleep improves, you make better food choices. When you eat better, you have

energy to move. When you move, your anxiety decreases. When anxiety decreases, you connect better with people. When you connect better, life gets richer. Life is more inspiring, and that fulfilling accomplishment you have always wanted get finished. Like me finishing this book.

It's not linear. It's exponential.

Fifteen years into this journey, I'm still discovering benefits. My business thrives because I can think clearly. My family life is amazing because I'm not an irritable zombie. When I am present I can keep up, show up, and light up when they enter the room. None of that was possible when I was slowly poisoning myself and calling it normal.

## The Permission You're Waiting For

If you've made it this far, you're probably one of two people:

1. Someone who sees themselves in my story and finally understands why they feel terrible
2. Someone who's been trying to get healthy for years and keeps falling off track

Either way, let me give you the permission you're waiting for:

**Permission to start small.** You don't need to overhaul your entire life tomorrow. One breath through your nose. One glass of water. One good night's sleep. That's enough to begin.

**Permission to fail.** You'll fall off track. Probably this week. Definitely this month. So what? Getting back on is the only skill that matters.

**Permission to be imperfect.** I still eat treats sometimes. I skip workouts. I stay up too late occasionally. The difference is these are choices now, not defaults.

**Permission to want more.** You're not shallow for wanting to look better. You're not selfish for prioritizing your health. You're not weak for admitting you need help.

**Permission to believe it can be different.** This is the big one. For 30 years, I believed feeling terrible was just my normal. I have an endless stream of clients who thought they could never lift more than 15lbs again, cause a surgeon told them so, or that migraines were normal with every rain fall, that frozen shoulder, or tight hips were just signs of getting old. That some people were healthy and some weren't, and I'd drawn the short straw. I was wrong. You might be wrong too.

## The Real Secret

After all the habits, tracking systems, and transformation stories, here's the real secret: none of this is actually about health.

It's about becoming who you're supposed to be.

When your body works, your mind clears. When your mind clears, your purpose emerges. When your purpose emerges, your life aligns. When your life aligns, you positively impact others. When you impact others, everything matters.

I thought I was just trying to fix my IBS and maybe gain some muscle. Instead, I found myself. The real me that had been buried under exhaustion, malnutrition, and anxiety for three decades.

## Your Turn

I've shown you my disasters. I've shared what worked. I've given you simple habits that cost almost nothing but change everything. Now it's on you.

Not to be perfect. Not to follow my exact path. But to start. Today. With one small thing.

Pick your hardest pillar—the one that makes you think "ugh, I really should work on that." Start there. Not because it's smart (it's actually probably not), but because that's the one that's holding everything else back.

For me, it was nutrition. I could work out for four hours, but I couldn't eat a vegetable. What's yours? Sleep? Movement? Finally dealing with that anxiety you've been calling "drive"? Be honest with yourself, relief is on the other side of that, when you realize making the change isn't that dramatic.

Whatever it is, face it. Not with a massive overhaul, but with one tiny habit. Do that habit tomorrow. And the next day. And the next.

In 30 days, you'll have momentum. In six months, you'll have transformation. In a year, you'll have a new normal. In five years, you'll barely remember feeling any other way.

## The Final Truth

You got this book for one of two reasons: you're desperate or you're curious. Either way, you know something needs to change.

That knowing is enough. It's the crack where the light gets in. It's your body trying one more time to get your attention, to tell you that this isn't how it has to be.

Listen to it.

Not to me. Not to any guru or influencer or perfect person pretending they have it all figured out. Listen to your own body telling you what it needs. It's been trying to tell you all along.

Water. Sleep. Real food. Movement. Sunlight. Breath. Presence.

Such simple things. Such profound changes.

You don't need anything special. You don't need to be special. You just need to start treating your body like it matters. Because it does. Because you do. Because the life you're meant to live is waiting on the other side of feeling like shit.

One habit. One day. One chance to be different.

What are you waiting for?

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*P.S. - If you see yourself in these pages, if you finally understand why you feel the way you do, if you're ready to change but scared to start—reach out. Email me ([info@growyourmusclesstudio.com](mailto:info@growyourmusclesstudio.com)). DM me (@althetrainer). Let me know you're beginning. Not because I need to know, but because you need to say it out loud. Sometimes that's all it takes to make it real.*

*Remember: I was the kid eating a quarter tub of ice cream every night while my body ate itself from the inside out. If I can build a healthy life, anyone can. Even you. Especially you.*

*Start today.*