

New Moon Wellness Blueprint: A Practical Guide to Healthy Living

by Natalie Madriz, LCSW

New Moons symbolize awareness, new beginnings, maximum potential and setting new intentions.

“Wellness is a state of optimal well-being that is oriented toward maximizing an individual's potential.”

-University of Illinois, McKinley Health Center

Disclaimer: This guide is intended for adult use and is to be used at the discretion of the reader. It should not be used as a medical guide and does not claim to cure, fix, heal anyone or any health or psychological problems. I am not and do not claim to be a medical professional. I strongly advise you to consult a specialist before beginning any treatment program or making any adjustment to your health care, diet, or/and your lifestyle. Do not remove yourself from any prescribed medications or treatments without consulting your physician. Any and all dietary supplements or nutritional products and treatments discussed in this guide or products recommended are not intended to diagnose, treat, prevent, or cure any health condition. The information contained in this guide is for general information and educational purposes only. Nothing contained in this guide is or shall be or considered, or used as a substitute for, medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Readers should always seek the advice of a medical practitioner with any questions regarding their physical and mental health. Never disregard, avoid, or delay obtaining medical advice or following the advice of a physician because of something you have read.

Introduction

I became interested in wellness after becoming a social worker. Because the work that I do is so emotionally taxing, it forced me to examine how I was treating myself. Work alone was creating a constant level of stress and left me very little time and energy for self care. I knew that I had to make some changes to start feeling better. I expanded my knowledge by doing a ton of reading, trying healthier food options, watching documentaries and keeping my mind open to new experiences that would help get me in good physical shape. This was a turning point for me and became the beginning of my journey of self discovery and wellness.

I found that individually, we must be accountable for our own health and wellbeing and determine if there are some areas that need improvement. If we are unable to restore and recharge ourselves regularly, we become depleted which can lead to mental and physical illness.

There is so much to learn and know about wellness—the more you take care of yourself, the greater you feel, the better your life becomes. Its never too late to start, learn something new or incorporate another aspect of wellness into your self care routine.

My hopes are that this guide helps you begin, or add to, a wellness routine that you will maintain throughout your lifetime. Everyone's starting point will be different, therefore, I strongly encourage you to seek out your own information and tailor a unique routine that meets your needs.

STRUCTURE AND PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this book you will find key terms that correspond with the section's topic. I also make recommendations for products that will enhance your wellness routine that can be purchased on my website www.nmwellnesslife.com

Many working professionals know what it takes to have a healthy lifestyle, but are unable to because they don't properly manage their time. The consequence of neglecting your own self care can be devastating.

People often wait for crises like heart attacks, a nervous breakdown, job loss, divorce, addiction or legal problems to occur in order for them to realize that they are in dire need of change. These extreme circumstances have a strong chance of being prevented when you engage in ongoing self care and wellness.

Wellness has everything to do with your success in life. No matter what your goals and aspirations are, you will only reach a certain level of productivity if you aren't "well." If you push

too hard and aren't taking good care of yourself, you will eventually crash and burn. It's all about keeping a healthy pace. Setting yourself up with a solid foundation through healthy living will give you the energy and strength you need to accomplish your goals. Creating the life you want begins with your physical and mental health.

WELLNESS IS...

- The awareness of your current state of health in multiple dimensions
- Healthy balance of the mind, body and spirit that results in an overall feeling of wellbeing
- An ongoing pursuit that includes various activities and daily routines
- An active process of awareness that makes choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life

WELLNESS PLANS ARE UNIQUE TO THE INDIVIDUAL— BUT SHOULD INCLUDE THE SAME PRINCIPLES

Mental Wellness

Feeling mentally stable and balanced, maintaining an open mind and establishing a useful base of knowledge.

Physical Wellness

Understanding that the human body requires a delicate balance in order to function at its optimal level. Taking the initiative to play an active role in your physical health.

Spiritual Wellness

Spirituality allows an individual to shift their focus from material and physical things, to embrace the human spirit and soul in a profound way. Spirituality and enlightenment creates a deeper sense of gratitude and satisfaction with life in general.

Social Wellness

Creating a solid network of people you choose to associate with. This involves staying connected to family, friends and our community. Engaging in socially and culturally relevant activities that you enjoy.

QUICK WELLNESS CHECK

Do you have an optimistic outlook on life?

Do you feel happy most of the time?

Do you mostly eat healthy, unprocessed food whenever possible?

Do you seek preventative, natural, alternative and homeopathic remedies?

Do you exercise at least 3 times per week?

Are you making enough time each day to relax, reflect and sleep to recharge yourself?

Have you dissolved destructive relationships/friendships?

Do you wake up feeling energized and well rested?

These are questions that we should be asking ourselves on a regular basis. If you answered ‘yes’ to most of them, you are doing well! If not, I am sure that you will benefit from what you’ll learn in this guide.

BENEFITS OF OPTIMAL WELLNESS

Mental clarity
Improved overall mood
Increased productivity
Improved concentration
Increased energy
Improved sleep
Improved digestion
Improved relationships, friendships and parenting
Work more effectively
Maintain healthy weight

TIME MANAGEMENT

Product Recommendations: Planner, Calendar

Effective time management, will allow you to plan ahead and squeeze in all of the components that are critical to your wellness routine. I maintain two calendars— one professional and one personal. I usually take an hour of time on Sundays to plan my week. I schedule the days where I will plan to go to yoga or the gym after work, run errands, complete household tasks, attend meetings or social events. Some evenings during my work week, I just plan to simply relax— depending on how I feel. You can be flexible with your schedule and switch certain activities to days where you are in the mood to do them—as long as you get them done! I also set my alarm on the weekends to wake up at a decent hour so I can take advantage of the extra time I have.

NUTRITION

Product Recommendations: Probiotics, Acai, Steel Cut Organic Oatmeal, RXBars, Flaxseed Meal, Turmeric, Goji Berries, Maca Powder, Chia Seeds, Almond Butter, Califia Farms Creamer, Almond Milk, Coconut Water, Blender, Citrus Squeezer, Coconut Bowl, Vegetable Wash, Juicer

People are resistant to change, especially when it comes to diet. Changing your eating habits doesn’t have to be a miserable experience. Surprisingly, healthier substitutes and alternatives for some of your favorite dishes are easy to find and can be very tasty. The food you eat either fuels your body and helps to regenerate healthy cells or feeds your body harmful chemicals. Consuming processed food that contains unhealthy fats (trans fatty oils), artificial sweeteners, flavors and colors can eventually lead to illness and can negatively affect your overall health. Processed food can taste good, but has addictive qualities. There is nothing wrong with enjoying

your favorite food, but it should be done sparingly and in moderation. When you eat this kind of food on a regular basis, you are putting your health at risk. The thought of dietary adjustments can be confusing and overwhelming, so let's go over the basics.

The use of apps and the internet have made being healthy much easier and way more accessible. I often get many of my meal ideas and recipes from apps like Pinterest and Instagram. The recipes are easy to find—for example, I'll search key phrases like “***high protein lunch recipes,***” “***heart healthy recipes,***” “***healthy breakfast ideas,***” “***banana blueberry smoothie,***” “***healthy sweet potato recipes,***” “***healthier mashed potato recipe,***” “***low fat dinner recipes,***” “***high blood pressure friendly recipes.***”

The healthiest possible diet mainly consists of plant based foods. Vegetables are naturally low in fat and calories and provide the nutrients (i.e., Vitamin A and C, potassium, fiber and folic acid) that are vital for health. Many health conditions can improve by making some changes to your diet. For example, diets rich in potassium can help you naturally maintain healthy blood pressure. Vegetables rich in potassium include sweet potatoes white potatoes, white beans, tomato products (paste, sauces, juice), lima beans, spinach and lentils.

Gut Health

Our digestive tract, also known as our “gut” is responsible for putting our body into working order. As it breaks down the food we eat, it absorbs nutrients that support our body's functions—from energy production to hormone balance, skin health to mental health and even toxin and waste elimination. About 70 percent of the immune system is housed in our gut, so making sure that your digestive system is functioning properly. Interestingly, getting an ample amount of sleep and lowering your stress levels can also improve digestion and gut health.

Processed foods can cause inflammation in the lining of your digestive tract because the body doesn't recognize the substance as digestible food with nutrients to absorb. They have artificial ingredients that feel foreign to the body which sets off an inflammatory response.

A diet rich in fiber, *probiotics* and *prebiotic* are the main factors to consider when cultivating balanced gut health. Fiber is an important part of proper bowel function. It helps to regulate the speed at which food moves through your body. If fecal matter sits in the colon, stool becomes hardened which make it more difficult to pass which causes constipation. A fiber rich diet has been linked to better health and reduces the risk of developing diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease and arthritis.

Digestive tracts are unique to the individual. However, one should excrete the body's waste in a reasonable amount of time. Regular bowel movements should range from once a day to 3 times a week. Persistent, chronic constipation may be a symptom of more serious conditions like irritable bowel syndrome, colorectal cancer, diabetes or an under active thyroid gland.

Probiotics in foods are beneficial microorganisms. They can be thought of as “good bacteria” that are found naturally in our gut and can combat infection causing microbes that are sometimes in the foods we eat or that flourish when we're sick. If you are seeking optimal gut health, consider taking a probiotic supplement in addition to a healthier diet. If you are purchasing a probiotic supplement, choose one that contains beneficial bacteria such as bifidobacteria and lacto-

bacillus species. Fermented food such as kimchi, yogurt/greek yogurt, miso, tempeh, Kombucha, olives, pickles, pickled beets, sauerkraut, aged cheeses (Cheddar, Gouda, Parmesan, Swiss) are naturally rich in natural probiotics.

Prebiotics, like onions, garlic, asparagus, berries, tomatoes, barley, flaxseed, oatmeal, bananas beans such as kidney, black, navy and white, chickpeas and lentils and legumes play a different role from probiotics. They're dietary fibers that feed the good bacteria in your gut that help renew and correct imbalance in your gut.

Signs that you may have an unhealthy gut:

You often are bloated, constipated, have diarrhea, gas on a regular basis

Food allergies or sensitivities

Anxiety

Depression

Mood swings and irritability

Skin problems like eczema

Diabetes

Autoimmune disease (Rheumatoid Arthritis, Lupus, Celiac Disease, Crohn's Disease etc.)

Frequent infections

Poor memory and concentration

Skipping Breakfast

The word break fast is titled appropriately. Its the first meal of the day and breaks the fast your brain and body experienced while you were sleeping. It provides the blood sugar necessary to help your brain and muscles function properly. It also kick starts your metabolism, helping you burn calories throughout the day. Having breakfast also prevents you from overeating later in the day and gives you the energy you need to focus and be productive. Studies have linked eating breakfast to good health, lower levels of bad cholesterol, lowered chances of developing diabetes, heart disease and being overweight.

High Protein, Low Sugar

The best choice for breakfast would be a meal that contains carbohydrates for energy, protein, and healthy fats and fiber and that will make you feel full. Smoothies, granola bars with a piece of fruit, oatmeal (steel cut is my favorite, contains more fiber than the instant oatmeal varieties - Trader Joe's has good frozen and dry options) with fruit and nuts. Oats are rich in omega 3 fatty acids, folate and potassium. Greek yogurt, contains probiotics, and is high in calcium and protein. Making grapefruit a part of your breakfast can help burn fat, regulate blood sugar and insulin levels and is high in immunity-boosting antioxidants. Adding a banana to your breakfast provides you with a healthy dose of potassium, which helps lower blood pressure. Consult with your doctor if you are taking medication. NOTE: grapefruit can interfere with some prescription drugs.

Almond butter is a great source of protein and is filled with good fat. You can spread it on a piece of whole grain toast or put a scoop in a smoothie. Flaxseeds are small brown seeds that are a great source of fiber and protein. Adding them to smoothies or sprinkling some on your toast, oatmeal or cereal can easily add nutritional value to your breakfast. Flaxseeds contain anti-inflammatory omega 3 fatty acids, along with antioxidants that help promote hormonal balance, clear skin, lower cholesterol, reduce sugar cravings and can help with weight loss. Flaxseeds are difficult for your body to digest when they are whole, so make sure you buy them ground or “flaxseed meal” and preferably *sprouted*.

Blueberries, fresh or frozen, are high in antioxidants and low in calories and can improve everything from memory, motor skills, metabolism and blood pressure.

Strawberries are high in antioxidants and vitamin c and low in calories and even decrease the chances of heart attacks in women if they are consumed at least 3 times a week.

Raspberries are high in cancer fighting antioxidants, fiber, vitamins c and k and help build strong bones. You can usually buy them year round, but they are also available (with equal nutritional value) frozen. Add them to smoothies, parfaits or on top of cereal or granola.

What’s in Your Morning Cup?

Product Recommendations: Coffee Mugs, Coffee Maker, Califia Farms Creamer

Coffee is low in calories and drinking it has also been linked to a lower risk of several diseases (such as diabetes and prostate cancer). Researchers suspect that the combination of caffeine and antioxidants are responsible for many of the observed health benefits. Coffee, just like anything else, can become a calorie filled, high sugar, fattening beverage when you add creamer, sugar and sweeteners. I usually mix almond milk and a non-dairy sweetener by Califia Farms (Whole Foods) that has natural sweeteners in it or I drink it black.

You may have read reports that drinking coffee can lead to cancer. However, The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) reviewed more than 1,000 studies in humans and animals and did not find adequate evidence to indicate that coffee is a carcinogen.

A 2017 study suggests that drinking coffee may, in fact, lower the risk of developing specific forms of cancer. Although older studies did sometimes find a link between drinking coffee and developing cancer, the cause was more closely linked to cigarette smoking rather than coffee. People who smoke also tend to drink coffee. More research into the link between coffee and cancer is necessary.

Prepare and Carry Your Own Food

Eating healthy will require some planning ahead. Before my week begins, I plan my grocery list based on what the meals I plan to make for lunch and dinner. It helps to keep my meals properly portioned and healthy. I typically pack my lunch and snacks for work the night before so that I can avoid overeating, unhealthy eating and skipping meals. I put my coffee maker on a timer, pre pack most of my smoothie ingredients in the blender cup, and put my refrigerated lunch items to one side of the fridge. I often shop for pre-made salads that come with the dressing, I’ll throw in almonds, fresh fruit, possibly some whole grain crackers, vegan cookies and

plenty of water. I have green smoothies on my workdays for breakfast, that way I can get in most of my nutrients in first thing the morning. A typical smoothie (I make up my own recipes), would include a handful of spinach, 3 strawberries, a small handful of blueberries, 3-4 teaspoons of ground flaxseed/flaxseed meal, 2 teaspoons of chia seeds, 1/2 cup of almond milk, 1/2 cup of coconut water, 6 ice cubes and a teaspoon of raw honey. Other ingredients I may include in a smoothie: Medjool dates (seeded), pineapple, raspberries, banana, hemp seeds, mac powder, slice of fresh turmeric, slice of fresh ginger.

Consider bringing healthy snacks with you on the road when you are out running errands. I find it difficult, inconvenient and expensive to find healthy food when I'm out and about. Healthy prepackaged snacks like almonds, dried fruit, low fat popcorn are other good options.

Processed Food

Essentially, all food products have been manipulated in some way, shape or form. Apples are cut from trees, ground beef has been processed in a machine and butter is cream that has been separated from the milk and churned.

Any food that has been canned, dehydrated, or had chemicals added to it, is considered a processed food—processed foods make up about 60% of the average American diet.

Some of the additives in processed foods contain harmful chemicals. They are added to preserve food from spoiling quickly and allow them to have longer shelf life. Raw, unprocessed (or minimally processed) food spoils within a few days to a week— heavily processed food can sit on a shelf or a pantry for several months. Put thought and planning into what you are putting into your body and read food labels! Google some of the ingredients you aren't familiar with so you know exactly what they are and what to stay away from.

Top 10 Toxic Ingredients Found in Processed Food:

Palm Oil

Shortening

White Flour, White Bread, White Pasta

High Fructose Corn Syrup

Artificial Sweeteners (coffee sweeteners, diet sweeteners, check labels of products that typically advertise as “sugar free”)

Sodium Benzoate and Potassium Benzoate

Butylated Hydroxyanisole (BHA)

Sodium Nitrates and Sodium Nitrites (found in processed meat: bacon, lunch meat, hot dogs)

Blue, Green, Red, Yellow food coloring

Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) often found in Chinese food

Minimally to highly processed foods, numbered from the least (number one) to most processed (number five):

1. The most minimally processed foods are products that are pre-prepped for convenient use - including chopped veggies and roasted nuts
2. Canned products such as tuna, beans, tomatoes, etc., are processed and stored in order to lock-in nutrients and flavors at their peak
3. Some canned and jarred products are processed a step further, especially to enhance flavor and preservation, and includes tomato sauce containing added sugar and salt
4. Foods that are ready-to-eat and wrapped and have a long shelf life are more heavily processed - think of your "go-to" snacks such as crackers, chips, and boxed cookies
5. Frozen and pre-made meals are the most processed form available. Mostly found in the freezer section, products include pizzas and microwavable entrees

Limit consumption of these highly processed foods for optimal health:

Packaged breads and baked goods

Sodas and sweetened drinks

Instant noodles and soups

Sweet or savory packaged snacks

Industrialized confectionery and desserts

Meat balls, chicken and fish sticks/nuggets

Other processed meat products with added preservatives other than salt, such as nitrates

Frozen or shelf-stable ready meals

Other food products made mostly or entirely from sugar, oils and fats (candy, potato chips)

Staying Hydrated

Product Recommendations: Water Infuser, Glass Water Bottles

Your body depends on water to survive and makes up about 50-65% of your body weight. Every cell, tissue and organ in your body needs water to work properly.

Main functions of water in your body:

Removes toxins through urination, perspiration and bowel movements

Keeps your temperature normal

Lubricates and cushions joints

Protects sensitive tissues

Transporting nutrients—distributing vitamins, minerals and glucose to nourish your cells.

The general recommended daily intake of water is 8-10, 8 oz. glasses of water per day. That's around 64-80 ounces a day. However, the Institute of Medicine recommends men consume an average of 125 ounces of water daily, and women drink approximately 91 ounces each day. Water can also be consumed through food, such as vegetables and fruit—having a morning smoothie will start your day with a decent amount of water. You should not be going through your day without taking a moment to acknowledge how your body is feeling. You should be doing “self check ins” several times throughout the day. In terms of hydration, a good rule of thumb is if your mouth is dry and your urine is dark, its time to drink some water.

Lack of enough water intake can lead to *dehydration* — a condition that occurs when you don't have enough water in your body to carry out normal functions. Even mild dehydration can drain your energy and make you tired. Dehydration occurs when you use or lose more fluid than you take in. If you don't replace lost fluids, you will become dehydrated.

SIGNS OF DEHYDRATION

- Extreme thirst
- Less frequent urination
- Dark-colored urine
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Confusion

The Importance of pH Balance

The billions of cells in our bodies must maintain alkalinity, in order to function and stay alive. The first line of defense against disease is a proper balance of ‘potential hydrogen’ or pH in the body. Disease thrives in an acidic body, which creates a favorable environment for the growth of cancer, bacteria, yeast, fungus, mold, viruses, and any other unwanted organisms.

An acidic state causes a lack of oxygenation at the cellular level. When the pH level falls below 7.4, there is less than the maximum oxygen in the blood. Blood carries the maximum oxygen at pH 7.4 (alkaline). Without proper oxygenation, unfriendly bacteria, mold, and viruses will prosper.

Processed v. Natural Juice

Product Recommendations: Juicer, Raw Generation 7 Day Skinny Cleanse

Most of the processed juice you buy in the grocery store taste good but don't have many health benefits and are high in sugar.

Processed Juices

- Nutrients are depleted during the pasteurization process of bottled juices
- Juices made from imported fruit may carry traces of banned pesticides

- Juice made from concentrate do not contain whole fruit and are often no more than sugar water -- possibly made with chemicals in water from industrial sites
- Acid from juice can leech metal from cans, causing canned juice to spoil
- Wax and other chemicals have been found in juice containers
- Shrink-wrapped juice cartons come under high heat that depletes enzymes in juice

Raw Juicing

Natural juice contains the same nutrients found in raw fruit. Which include the promotion of healthy cellular growth and development, healthy digestion, energy, protection against oxidation, enriches blood, provides your body with active enzymes. All which help to detoxify your body from harmful substances.

Herbal Tea

Product Recommendations: Tea Pot, Tea Cups, Portable Tea Tumbler, Loose Leaf Tea Steeper, Electric Hot Water Boiler, Tea, Stainless Steel Mesh Tea Ball

*If pregnant or breastfeeding, check with your doctor about what herbs are safe.

Herbal tea is an infusion of leaves, seeds, roots or bark extracted in hot water. Tea is known for being flavorful, calming and full of antioxidants. Drinking tea is a great way to stay hydrated and support the growth of healthy cells, tissues and organs. While by no means a comprehensive list, these herbal teas are effective and readily available at your local grocery store or online.

Some of the common varieties you can find in stores include chamomile, dandelion root, lemon, ginger, turmeric, orange, peppermint, elderflower, rooibos and milk thistle. Tea can help you in a variety of ways - some of the benefits of tea include healthy and normal digestion, healthy respiratory functioning, cold and flu symptoms, menstrual cramps, inflammation, seasonal allergies, rheumatic pain, hemorrhoids, swelling, detoxing and cleansing and fever reduction.

With literally hundreds of tea on the market, it may be confusing to know what kind to choose. If you are seeking relief of a specific ailment, research to see which type of tea best meets your needs, if not, just choose a flavor you like. If possible, choose high quality, organic tea. It can be bought in bags or loose. If you prefer loose tea, you will need an infuser.

Infused Water

Products: Water Infuser Carafe, Water Infuser Bottle, Fruit Slicer, Fruit/Vegetable Wash

Infused water is another simple way to enjoy the benefits of fresh fruit, herbs and vegetables—it takes nothing more than slicing some fruit or grabbing some fresh herbs and letting them sit in water for a few hours. Infusing your water is a cost effective, easy way to get your nutrients without all of the added sugar/artificial sweeteners, calories and chemicals.

Water Infusion Guidelines

Avoid using plastic containers—they can often contain a harmful chemical called BPA that can leak into the water. It's best to use large glass bottles or jars with lids. Give the fruit, vegetables and herbs a good wash or rinse. You can leave the fruit or vegetables peeled or unpeeled. If they are unpeeled, make sure they are thoroughly washed. Try to buy organic to avoid chemicals or pesticides in your water. Avoid any fruit that's bruised or overly ripe, or herbs that don't look fresh. Add the fruit, herbs, vegetables into a bottle of cool water. Use thin slices or small cubes so that the flavor will infuse quickly. Ideally you should let the water become infused for 2 hours at room temperature and then refrigerate.

Additional Tips for Infusing Water

- You can use a carafe or jar designed specifically for infusing water, that has a compartment that holds the what you are infusing—it makes it easier so that fruit particles are less likely to float around.
- If you don't drink the infused water within 24 hours—strain solids and refrigerate the water for up to 3 days.
- When infusing loose herbs (rosemary, thyme, mint) or flowers (lavender, hibiscus, rose petals) use a brew bag or infuser
- When infusing citrus, be mindful that unpeeled citrus can make the water bitter if left too long. When making a large amount—peel before soaking. Or, soak unpeeled fruit for 4 hours, remove then add fresh slices for looks. Make sure to keep the water icy and cold to prevent bacteria growth.

These ingredients can be found at your local grocery store, farmers market, grown locally or ordered online for home delivery and used to infuse your water:

Orange

Strawberry

Lemon

Lemon + Fresh Thyme

Cucumber + Lime + Strawberry + Mint

Orange + Star Anise + Hibiscus

Watermelon + Honeydew Melon + Mint

Cucumber + Mint + Jalapeño

Lemon + Raspberry + Rosemary

Orange + Blueberry + Basil

Lemon + Lime + Mint

Mango + Pineapple

Strawberry + Cucumber

Apple + Cinnamon Stick

Physical Health

EXERCISE

Product Recommendations: Gym Lock, Gym Duffle Bag, Workout Gloves, Pedometer Wristband, Waist Trimmer, Resistance Bands, Fitness Tracker Wristband, Trigger Point Foam Roller, High Density Foam Roller, Self Massage Tool, Deep Tissue Massage Therapy Balls, Blood Pressure Monitor

We all know how important regular exercise is, even if you don't have a fitness goal. Physical activity is critical to your health, especially as you age and begin to lose lean muscle. Life can become so busy with work and family that it's easy to skip a workout or ignore that we haven't had enough physical activity for the day. Regular exercise helps reduce stress and anxiety, can improve depressed moods, keeps your heart healthy and helps you sleep better at night. For general fitness, a good balance of cardio and strength training is recommended.

- Cardiovascular exercise elevates your heart rate and increases your breathing rate which is key to maintaining a healthy weight, increasing endurance and maintaining a strong heart. Cardio includes activities like brisk walking, jogging, running, cycling, playing tennis, basketball, jumping rope, kickboxing, swimming and exercise on the treadmill or elliptical machine.
- You should be getting at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate cardio or 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous cardio activity a week, or a combination of moderate and vigorous activity. The guidelines suggest that you spread out this exercise during the course of a week.
- Strength training sculpts the body, tones muscles, reduces body fat, increases lean muscle mass, develops strong bones, manages your weight, reduce symptoms of chronic conditions such as back pain, obesity, heart disease and burns calories. It can help you enhance and preserve your muscle mass at any age.
- Exercise is recommended for all major muscle groups at least twice a week. Aim to do a single set of each exercise, using a weight or resistance level heavy enough to tire your muscles after about 12 to 15 repetitions. Strength training can include use of weight machines, barbells, your own body weight while doing push ups, planks, squats, resistance machines, resistance tubing, resistance paddles in the water, or activities such as hiking.

As a general goal, aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. If you want to lose weight or meet specific fitness goals, you may need to exercise more. Want to aim even higher? You can achieve more health benefits, including increased weight loss, if you ramp up your exercise to 300 minutes a week. Reducing sitting time is important, too. The more hours you sit each day, the higher your risk of metabolic problems, even if you achieve the recommended amount of daily physical activity.

Luckily, in this day and age of smart phones and advanced technology, tracking your health has become much easier. There are several health related apps available, depending on what your goals are. iPhones already come equipped with the 'health' app that has the ability to record daily mindfulness minutes, nutritional data, physical activity and sleep patterns. It has the option of entering your heart data—which includes your blood pressure, reproductive health for women—which tracks your menstrual and ovulation cycles. Not only does it record that informa-

tion, it can analyze it as well to keep you on track. Under each category, you will also find other suggested apps that you may be interested in—most of which are free.

I give myself weekly fitness targets and plan around my obligations and work schedule to make sure I meet them. For example, I'll set a goal of getting a certain number of steps in daily, so I'll check my health app to see how many I have at the end of my work day. If my goal hasn't been met, I know that I need to go for a walk or hit the gym after work. When possible, I take a walk around the block on my lunch break to get out and enjoy some sunshine, fresh air and get my body moving. If you have flexibility in your work schedule and can take an extended lunch, plan to go to the gym once or twice a week during that time—or get yourself on a schedule where you can wake up early 1-2 days out of the week to go to the gym in the early morning hours. Do whatever is most convenient for you and get a workout in. I've had to find gyms that are convenient to get to—near home and work. Give yourself options so you don't feel obligated to have the same exact routine everyday. Find our nearest community college and see what kind of exercise classes they have in the evenings. They usually offer classes like tennis, dance and swimming which are usually inexpensive and are offered at least once a week. If you have a long commute, find a local park or recreation center near your job and go for a walk a few times a week until traffic dies down. If I plan to go to yoga after work, I pack a bag the night before and I check the schedule of the yoga studio website to see which class I'll take. I consider my travel time and the amount of time that I will need to have a snack, change my clothes and park. This allows me to be there on time without it being a stressful situation. Doing yoga after work allows me to completely focus on myself, decompress, relieve any built up stress from my day. My most difficult and demanding days should end with yoga. Every single time I finish the class, I am in a better mood, relaxed and calm.

Classes and gym memberships can be expensive. If they aren't in your budget, there are other ways to get your daily exercise without having to spend a dime. You can start by incorporating healthier short cuts into your daily activities at work like taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Walk to your local store on the weekends instead of driving. One of my rules when I get home on most days is to not sit down—I come in and immediately change my clothes to go for a mile walk. If I do sit down—even to watch TV, I get too comfortable and I waste too much time. My goal is to have a productive evening and keep myself busy until its time to wind down and go to sleep. I only have about 4-5 hours to get everything done—that includes, exercise, eating dinner, preparing my clothes and food for the next day and getting ready for bed. If you want to be healthy, productive and successful—you must sacrifice. I sacrifice my relaxation time often—but that doesn't mean I don't take care of myself and relax on the weekends.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRETCHING

Product Recommendations: Resistance Stretching Bands, Yoga Mat, Yoga Towel

Strength training and cardio are activities that are critical to your overall health, but they should be accompanied by stretching. Stretching allows you to execute these activities effectively. It keeps your muscles flexible, strong and healthy, improves blood flow and circulation throughout your body and helps to maintain a healthy range of motion in your joints. Without stretching, your muscles become shorter and tighter and make you more prone to joint pain,

strains, muscle damage and injury. For example, prolonged sitting can cause tightness in your thigh and hamstring, which can affect the range of motion of your legs when walking. That will in turn affect your ability to safely do an exercise like playing tennis, hiking or riding a bike, which can lead to injury or muscle strain.

The body contains over 600 muscles and stretching your larger muscles daily keeps them long, lean and flexible. The most importance ones to stretch daily are your lower, larger muscles—calves, hamstrings, hip flexors (in pelvis), quadriceps (front of the thigh). Stretching your lower back, arms and neck at least 3-4 days a week is ideal.

STRETCHING TIPS

Research has shown that stretching the muscles before they are warmed up can actually be counterproductive. When the muscle fibers are cold or inactive, you may damage them if they are strained too much. It is recommended that you do a light warm up exercise (short walk, jogging in place, etc.) and stretch afterward.

When stretching, hold your stretch for 30 seconds without bouncing—the goal is to feel tension in the muscle, not pain.

Yoga and pilates are **excellent** for safe and thorough stretching. Typically done in a group setting, a certified teacher provides step by step instruction on how to stretch many areas of the body with the use of equipment to minimize the chance of injury. Pilates and yoga studios usually offer the first week free or a demo class so you can ask questions and get a feel for what the classes are like before you commit to a membership.

A professional assessment can be helpful if you'd like specific stretch regiments tailored to your needs. Chiropractors, physical therapists and personal trainers would be a good place to start. Make sure that they are certified and experienced. As always, if you have injuries, a chronic condition or medical concerns, consult with a physician before starting a physical activity—you may have some important restrictions to be mindful of.

STRESS

Symptoms related to stress may be affecting your health, without you realizing it. Stress impacts your body, thoughts and behavior. Being able to recognize common symptoms can help you manage them in a healthy way.

People experience stress in different ways—some may have digestive symptoms, while others may have headaches, sleeplessness, sadness, anger or irritability. Routine stress may be the hardest type of stress to notice at first, because its constant and your body gets no clear signal to return to normal functioning. People under chronic stress can be prone to more frequent and severe viral infections, such as the flu or common cold. Over time, stress weakens your immune system and can contribute to complications like heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and mental disorders like depression and anxiety.

ROUTINE STRESS V. TRAUMATIC STRESS

Routine stress related to work, school, family and other daily responsibilities are common and with a self care routine are manageable. Stress brought about by a sudden negative change, such as losing a job, divorce, or illness are upsetting, but also very manageable and can usually be resolved in a reasonable amount of time after they occur.

Traumatic stress is caused by an event like a major accident, war, assault or a natural disaster where you became a victim of, or witnessed others being put in danger of being seriously hurt or killed. In response to danger, your brain and body prepare to face the threat or flee to safety (“fight or flight”). In these situations, your heart rate increases, you breathe faster, your muscles become tense, your brain uses more oxygen and increases activity—all functions that are aimed at survival.

- **People who experience traumatic stress often experience temporary symptoms of mental illness like flashbacks, nightmares, poor concentration and anger management, sensitivity to noise and large crowds, etc., but most can recover naturally soon after. If these symptoms persist longer than 3 months after the event, seeking professional help, such as individual therapy would be appropriate.**

5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT STRESS

1. Stress affects everyone

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Some people may cope with ease or recover from stressful events more quickly than others, while others struggle with lingering symptoms that last for years

2. Not all stress is bad

Certain stress can motivate people to prepare or perform, like when they need to take a test or interview for a new job. Stress and adrenaline can be life-saving in some situations.

3. Long-term stress can harm your health

Health problems can occur if the stress response goes on for too long, when the source of stress is constant or if stress response symptoms continue after the danger has subsided. With chronic stress, those same life-saving responses in your body can suppress immune, digestive, sleep, and reproductive systems, which may cause them to stop working normally.

4. There are effective ways to manage stress

The effects of stress tend to build up over time. Taking practical steps to manage your stress can reduce or prevent negative effects.

5. If you're feeling overwhelmed by stress, ask for help from a health professional

You should seek help right away if you often feel depressed, have suicidal thoughts, are constantly overwhelmed, feel you cannot cope or are using drugs or alcohol to cope. Your doctor or a licensed mental health professional can provide a recommendation.

Helpful Tips for Stress Management

- Recognize the signs of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, irritability, feeling depressed and having low energy
 - Get regular exercise. Just 30 minutes per day of walking can help boost your mood and reduce stress.
 - Try a relaxing activity such as reading, deep breathing, massages or a hobby that you enjoy
 - Explore stress coping programs that include meditation, yoga, tai chi, or other gentle exercises.
- For some stress-related conditions, these approaches are used as a form of treatment

TOXIC PEOPLE AND TOXIC JOBS

People who will resist, threaten and sabotage the possibility of your self-improvement are considered **toxic**. Toxic people are dangerous because they resent your progress and are threatened by the idea that you'll surpass them with your accomplishments. They may compare your improvements with their own shortcomings. Or perhaps they're just threatened by the potential they see in you and are resistant to change.

The result can be anger, resentment, frustration, manipulation or cruelty. Toxic people can exist in your life as someone you're dating, friends, family members or colleagues. Consciously or subconsciously they are sabotaging your happiness and growth. Identifying toxic relationships and understanding how to manage them is crucial to your wellness, success and happiness.

Let's discuss how to recognize toxic people and navigate the often difficult and emotional process of removing them from your life. Because in a very real way, your future happiness and success depends on it.

Toxic or Annoying?

It's important to be able to differentiate between the two. Some people can be unpleasant — annoying, difficult, demanding or needy. These people are not necessarily “toxic,” in the strict sense of the term. They're just generally undesirable. You might want to create a little distance from this type of person, but you won't have the same urgency to cut them out of your life. You have to decide whether someone requires distance or they need to be cut off completely.

People often fail to recognize the red flags associated with toxic people. When toxic people are in your life they'll keep you wrapped in their web by manipulating you to argue and involving you in their constant problems. When you finally cut them out of your life, you notice how much more peaceful everything is. Without healthy boundaries, toxicity can continue for years in friendships and relationships.

CLASSIC SIGNS OF TOXIC PEOPLE

- Toxic people try to control you
- Toxic people disregard your boundaries
- Toxic people take without giving

- Toxic people are always “right”
- Toxic people always play the victim role
- Toxic people are dishonest
- Toxic people don’t take responsibility for their actions
- Toxic people often project their issues and insecurities onto others unconsciously

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Don't expect them to change
- Don't bother trying to change them
- Don't allow yourself to be pulled into their crises
- Don't engage in pointless arguments with them

Removing Toxic People from Your Life

Toxic people are so unhappy with their own lives that they are willing to sabotage what you have and who you are to make themselves feel better. It is important to understand how the negativity from a toxic relationship can impede on your progress and your journey of self improvement. Toxic people may have you second guess yourself about an important decision and can make you feel uncomfortable for sharing your accomplishments. You will often find yourself in problematic situations that will have you acting out of character.

Toxic energy can be contagious and more often than not, the pattern exits without us even realizing it. If you’ve ever had a toxic boss, then you know how this works. His behavior makes you irritable, so you lose your temper with your coworkers or customers. It negatively impacts your day and you bring that stress home with you. That negative energy can unconsciously spread, affecting your relationships with friends and family.

For many toxic relationships — especially with friends and colleagues — you’ll only need to make a conscious decision to create some space, without having a conversation with the toxic person again. Remember: You don’t owe anyone an explanation when you establish personal boundaries. You can just slowly ghost out of their life to the degree necessary, until you’re no longer affected by the toxicity.

SELF CARE = SELF LOVE {MY FAVORITE SECTION}

Product Recommendations: Mindfulness Journal, Self Exploration Journal, Positive Affirmations Cards, Himalayan Salt Lamp, Warm Mist Facial Steamer

Self care is the secret to a well balanced life and is often what’s missing from people’s daily routines. It is the culmination of everything mentioned in this guide—activities that contribute to your health and happiness. It should be practiced daily and carefully crafted to meet your individual needs. It simply requires that you do things that make you feel good.

Think of your self care practice as your personal ‘tool box’ that you have access to when you need to ‘fix’ something in order to feel better. Practicing self care shouldn’t be stressful experience. There are small adjustments you can make in your routine that promote your self care.

It can mean squeezing in a massage on your lunch hour or simply taking a 2 minute break at your desk to do a breathing and mindfulness exercise.

SELF CARE TIPS

- Create some playlists that you love and play them while working and/or on your drive home
- Limit time listening to and watching the news
- Take a break from your phone when you get home—make sure you are enjoying family time, downtime alone or exercise
- Know when to say ‘no’ to socializing or doing people favors if you aren’t up to it
- Make sure you are getting 6-8 hours of sleep a day
- Decompress throughout the day as needed, not just at the end of your day

SEX LIFE

Sex and sexuality are an important part of life. The benefits of a healthy sex life are often overlooked. Aside from reproduction, sex can be a source of intimacy and pleasure. People with active sex lives also tend to exercise more frequently and have better dietary habits than those who are less sexually active. Sexual activity, intercourse and masturbation—when done responsibly, can offer many surprising benefits to various aspects of your life. People with active sex lives tend to exercise more frequently and have better dietary habits than those who are less sexually active. Sexual health means more than avoiding disease and unplanned pregnancy. It’s also about incorporating sex as an important part of your life for good overall health.

HOW CAN SEX BENEFIT YOUR BODY?

According to the American Sexual Health Association, studies suggest that sex can:

- Be a good form of light cardiovascular exercise in men and women
- Burn calories
- Increase heart health
- Strengthen muscles
- Reduce risk of heart disease, stroke, and hypertension
- Increase libido
- Lower Blood Pressure

Better Sleep

Your body releases *oxytocin*, also called the love or intimacy hormone and endorphins during an orgasm. The combination of these hormones can act as sedation.

Better sleep can contribute to:

- A stronger immune system
- A longer lifespan

- Feeling more well-rested
- Having more energy during the day

Headache Relief

Studies have shown that sexual activity can provide full or partial relief from migraines and cluster headaches.

Of people who were sexually active while suffering from headaches:

- 60 percent reported an improvement during a migraine
- 70 percent reported moderate to complete relief during a migraine
- 37 percent reported improvement of symptoms in cluster headaches
- 91 percent reported moderate to complete relief in cluster headaches

Benefits for Men

One study found that men who averaged having 4.6 to 7 ejaculations a week were 36 percent less likely to receive a prostate cancer diagnosis before the age of 70. This is in comparison to men who reported ejaculating 2.3 or fewer times a week on average. For men, sex may even affect your mortality. One study that had a 10 year follow-up reported that men who had frequent orgasms (defined as two or more a week) had a 50 percent lower mortality risk than those who had sex less often.

Benefits for Women

Having an orgasm increases blood flow and releases natural pain-relieving chemicals. The act of sex can help strengthen your pelvic floor which reduces the chance of a vaginal prolapse. One study showed that intercourse can result in reflexive vaginal contractions caused by penile thrusting.

Sexual activity in women can:

- Improve bladder control
- Reduce incontinence
- Relieve menstrual and premenstrual cramps
- Improve fertility
- Build stronger pelvic muscles
- Help produce more vaginal lubrication
- Potentially protect you against endometriosis (the growth of tissue outside your uterus)

Sex and Mental Health

Sexual activity, with a partner or through masturbation, can provide important psychological and emotional benefits. Like exercise, sex can help reduce stress and anxiety and increase happiness. Studies suggest that sexual activity (intercourse) may correlate with:

- Increased satisfaction with your mental health
- Increased levels of trust, intimacy, and love in your relationships
- Improved ability to perceive, identify, and express emotions
- Orgasms cause a natural high by releasing dopamine in the brain

At an older age, sexual activity may positively impact your well-being and ability to think. Research found that sexually active adults between 50 to 90 years old had better memory. They were also less likely to feel depressed and lonely. Frequent sexual activity, whether with a partner or alone, can even make you look younger. This is partially due to the release of estrogen during sex. One study found a correlation between frequent sexual activity and looking significantly younger (between seven to 12 years younger).

Celibacy and Abstinence

Although sex can contribute to overall wellbeing—it doesn't come without risk. You can still lead an active and happy life without sex. The benefits of sex come from the feeling of pleasure, which studies show can also come from listening to music, interacting with pets, and having strong religious faith.

It is important for both men and women who are sexually active to get regular check ups and STD screenings. If you aren't in a monogamous relationship, you are at risk for disease. It is good to be in tune with your body. Be aware of any changes that would prompt you to see a physician—however, STDs don't always show symptoms. If you have multiple partners and have been having unprotected or as I like to call it, irresponsible sex, you should be screened regularly and treated if necessary. This will prevent reproductive problems and the spread of disease.

DIGITAL DETOX

Life and work often require us to spend an excessive amount of time on a screen of some sort. As difficult as it may be, it is important for us to limit this amount of time as much as possible. Excessive screen time can cause damage to the retina and strain the eye muscles. Its best to give your eyes a break every 20 minutes—briefly close your eyes or look away from the computer or device to an object 20 feet away or further for 20 seconds or more.

In addition to the physical strain, the constant mental stimulation can also take a toll on you. Sometimes its best to be able to take a mental break, give yourself some quiet time to be in touch with how you're feeling.

MINDFULNESS

Being mindful is one of the easiest, most natural states for the human mind. It suggests that you are present in that very moment and only tuned into what's happening in your body, how you exist within your space and what is happening around you. It sounds simple right? Well, we often spend our time either engaged in an activity or asleep—rarely stopping to just be present in the moment.

Being mindful is an active practice. One of its advantages is that it can be done whenever and wherever necessary. Negative thinking, worry and fear often consume our thoughts. When having unpleasant thoughts, mindfulness is available to get you back in focus. The act in itself

can be calming, since our body has internal rhythms that help it relax if we allow them the opportunity to.

Mindfulness has the potential to become a transformative phenomenon

Here's why:

- Any and everyone can do it. Mindfulness practice is inclusive of universal human qualities and does not require anyone to change their beliefs.
- It's a way of living. Mindfulness is more than just a practice. It brings awareness and caring into everything we do—and it cuts down needless stress. Even a little bit of it makes our lives better.
- It's evidence-based. Mindfulness has been studied and proven to work. Both science and experience demonstrate its positive benefits for our health, happiness, work, and relationships.
- It sparks creativity. As we deal with our world's increasing uncertainty, mindfulness can provide us with easily learned, low-cost responses to difficult problems.

Mindfulness can be used when seated, walking and standing and by inserting short breaks into everyday life. Meditation practice can also be used while doing other activities, such as yoga or sports. When we're mindful, we reduce stress, enhance performance, gain insight and awareness through observing our own mind, and increase our attention to the well-being of those around us.

Mindfulness gives us a time in our lives when we can stop judgment and unleash our natural curiosity about the workings of the mind. This allows us to approach our experience with warmth and kindness and to love ourselves and others.

MINDFULNESS FOR BEGINNERS

Waking Up, throughout the day as needed and when feeling stressed:

- Breathe in for 3 counts, hold for 3 counts and exhale for 3 counts —repeat. When breathing, listen to your breath flow in and out. Close your eyes and place your hands on your thighs or knees if it enhances your relaxation.
- When eating and drinking, notice the flavor, texture and temperature of your food or drink. Take your time chewing and enjoying each bite. Avoid being near your phone or rushing to finish your meal.
- When feeling stressed or in need of a break, find a quiet space, take some mindful breaths while gently rolling your shoulders in a circular motion in whatever direction feels comfortable—acknowledge the stress leaving your body and notice how you feel afterward.

- Connect with nature—Keep fresh flowers and plants in your home and work space, take time to acknowledge their beauty and appreciate their beauty. Enjoy the outdoors as much as possible, without distraction—taking in the sights, views, sounds and smells when outdoors.
- Acknowledge your feelings without judgment. Allow your emotions to flow through you, without labeling them as good or bad.
- Mentally scan your body from head to toe, consciously relaxing areas that are holding stress and tension.

AROMATHERAPY AND ESSENTIAL OILS

Product Recommendations: Aromatherapy Candles, Essential Oils, Essential Oil Diffuser

Ancient civilizations studied the beneficial attributes of flowers and trees and used them for medicinal purposes. They relied on cures extracted from plants to heal their people or to improve the quality of life. It took hundreds of years of studying the plant components to understand how they can be used to for healing.

Aromatherapy, also referred to as essential oil therapy, can be defined as the art and science of utilizing naturally extracted aromatic essences from plants to balance, harmonize and promote the health of body, mind and spirit. It seeks to unify physiological, psychological and spiritual processes to enhance an individual's innate healing process. The easiest way to enjoy aromatherapy is to infuse essential oil and allow the scent to fill the room.

Essential oils can be used directly on the skin but are very concentrated and should be diluted beforehand. Because they are so pure and powerful, they can cause irritation and allergic reactions. The most popular way of diluting essential oils are to use a “carrier oil” such as almond, apricot, avocado, coconut, grape seed, jojoba or olive. Don't use water, honey, tea, juice or vinegar. They won't effectively dilute the essential oil. There are charts online and books that can provide the proper ratio to use when preparing essential oil to apply to your skin.

How to Use Essential Oils:

Apply to the skin (see information above)

Inhale the oil by holding the open bottle up to your nose or putting a few drops in a tissue and taking some deep breaths

Steam Inhalation Boil 2-3 cups of water, pour it in a bowl and add 2-5 drops of oil to the water and slowly inhale the steam or put a few drops of oil in an electronic face steamer

Oil Diffuse Electronic diffusers fill the air with the essential oil of your choice

Bath Add some drops of your favorite oil to your bath water

Massage After diluting your favorite oil, it can be used for a relaxing massage

COMMON USES

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Insomnia
- Sore Muscles
- Circulation Problems
- Menstrual pain
- Menopause problems

OILS AND THEIR USES

Basil depression and migraines

Bergamot Gut health and digestion

Black Pepper Stimulates blood circulation, heal bruises or relieve muscular pain

Chamomile Relaxation and calming

Citronella Insect repellent

Clove When being applied topically, clove oil is able to act as an analgesic, especially if you're facing a toothache. It can also prevent nausea and vomiting.

Eucalyptus Able to perform as a healing agent if you're having the flu and helps to clear your respiratory system

Geranium Antiseptic and astringent properties

Jasmine Aphrodisiac qualities so if you're trying to work this aspect apply a few drops of jasmine oil on your bed sheets or on your clothes

Lavender Floral scent that can be used as an antiseptic for minor cuts and the substance will help your skin recover and it will also provide enough strength for the tissue to regain its initial form leaving you without any scars

Lemon Good for weight loss and can also be used to lift your mood

Tea Tree Fights bacteria and has powerful disinfectant qualities and when diluted can be used in a mouth wash

Yarrow Helps reduce joint inflammation on a long term usage but it can also be used for cold or flu symptoms.

*****Always consult with your health care provider before using essential oils for health/physical concerns.*****

Mental Health, Addiction & Treatment

ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM

We live in a demanding, stressful society and it's common for people to seek immediate stress relief and relaxation. As we know, alcohol is what many people use to unwind after a long day and to celebrate and socialize. However, excessive alcohol use can have profound effects on the mind and body, especially after long term consumption.

AFFECTS OF THE BRAIN

Alcohol interferes with the brain's communication pathways, and can affect the way the brain looks and works. These disruptions can change mood and behavior, and make it harder to

think clearly and move with coordination. Diminished brain size and memory loss has been found amongst long term drinkers. Excessive alcohol use can weaken your immune system, making your body a much easier target for disease. Chronic drinkers are more liable to contract diseases like pneumonia and tuberculosis than people who do not drink too much. Drinking a lot on a single occasion slows your body's ability to ward off infections – even up to 24 hours after getting drunk.

HEART

Drinking a lot over a long time or too much on a single occasion can damage the heart, causing problems including:

- Cardiomyopathy – Stretching and enlarged heart muscle
- Arrhythmias – Irregular heart beat
- Stroke
- High blood pressure

LIVER

Heavy drinking takes a toll on the liver, and can lead to a variety of problems and liver inflammations including:

- Steatosis (fatty liver)
- Alcoholic hepatitis
- Fibrosis
- Cirrhosis

PANCREAS

Alcohol causes the pancreas to produce toxic substances that can eventually lead to pancreatitis, a dangerous inflammation and swelling of the blood vessels in the pancreas that prevents proper digestion.

CANCER

Drinking too much alcohol can increase your risk of developing certain cancers, including cancers of the:

- Mouth
- Esophagus
- Throat
- Liver
- Breast

WHAT'S LOW RISK DRINKING?

Low risk does not mean *no risk*. Even within these limits, alcohol can cause problems if people drink too quickly or have health problems. Based on your health and how alcohol affects you, you may need to drink less or not at all.

When is "low-risk" drinking still too much?

It's safest to avoid alcohol altogether if you are:

- Taking medications that negatively interact with alcohol
- Managing a medical condition that can worsen with drinking
- Breastfeeding, pregnant or trying to become pregnant

Women's v. Men's Low Risk Limits

Research shows that women start to have alcohol-related problems at lower drinking levels than men do. One reason is that on average, women weigh less than men. In addition, alcohol disperses in body water, and pound for pound, women have less water in their bodies than men do. So after a man and woman of the same weight drink the same amount of alcohol, the woman's blood alcohol concentration will tend to be higher, putting her at greater risk for harm.

What are the symptoms of an alcohol use disorder?

Because alcohol isn't an illicit drug, people tend to be unclear about healthy limitations and when it can become harmful. It's important to be familiar with the signs of alcohol abuse so that you know when it's necessary to get professional help.

WARNING SIGNS

- There have been times when you ended up drinking more, or longer than you intended
- More than once wanted to cut down or stop drinking and you were unable to
- More than once gotten into situations while or after drinking that increased your chances of getting hurt (such as driving, swimming, using machinery or having sex irresponsibly)
- You have to drink much more than you once did to get the effect you want—or found that your usual number of drinks had much less effect than before
- Continued to drink even though it was making you feel depressed, anxious or adding to another health problem or after having had a memory blackout
- You often spend a lot of time or a whole day drinking
- Continued to drink even though it was causing problems with your family or friends
- Your drinking—or being sick from drinking—often interfered with your home, family, job or other responsibilities
- Given up or cut back on activities that were previously important or interesting to you, or gave you pleasure, in order to drink

- More than once gotten arrested, had a DUI or had other legal problems because of your drinking
- Found that when the effects of alcohol were wearing off, you had withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, restlessness, nausea, sweating, a racing heart or a seizure

WHEN IS IT TIME TO SEE A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL?

There are various types and levels of severity when it comes to mental illness and issues related to mental health. For purposes of this guide, only depression and anxiety will be discussed.

Periods of depression and anxiety are common for people to experience, but can become problematic if the condition becomes chronic and is left untreated. People can be high functioning in certain areas of their lives—they are able to go to school, develop relationships, get a job, etc. However, they eventually load up their plate with so much that they reach a breaking point. Why? They never learned how to effectively manage stress, have healthy relationships, be responsible parents, deal with conflict and stay away from drugs and/or alcohol in their most stressful moments. Some of the most difficult things for people to do is be accountable for past mistakes and poor judgment. It can be difficult to take an honest look at areas of their lives and make improvements.

SIGNS THAT YOU MAY NEED COUNSELING/THERAPY

- You have legal problems related to your anger (battery, domestic violence, criminal threats, assault)
- You feel so depressed and angry that you engage in reckless behavior and you're doing things that could possibly result in a criminal charge
- Your drug and/or alcohol use has interfered with your relationships and you have lied about it or hid it from people you care about
- Your drug/alcohol use has interfered with your ability to perform your job and/or impacted your work attendance
- You are using drugs and/or alcohol every single day

SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

- Feeling sad 3-4 days out of the week
- Anger or irritability
- Crying often

- Feeling helpless and hopeless
- Decrease or increase in appetite
- Decrease in energy and motivation
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Sleeping too much
- Thoughts of suicide
- Thoughts of death or dying

SIGNS OF ANXIETY

- Excessive worry
- Panic attacks
- Poor concentration
- Difficulty sleeping (especially when accompanied by nightmares)
- Irrational worry and fear
- Muscle tension (primarily in neck and shoulder area)
- Flashbacks of violent or disturbing incidents you have experienced
- Chronic stomach/digestive problems
- Being in crowds makes you nervous

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO DIAGNOSE YOURSELF

The information provided is intended to give the reader a general idea of signs and symptoms to become familiar with.

PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATION

Psychotropic may sometimes be necessary to treat symptoms of diagnosed mental illness at the discretion of your physician. I encourage people to ask questions and do their own research prior to taking psychotropic medication. The reasons for this are because (1) these meds don't teach you coping skills and don't help to resolve the issues that may be causing some of your

symptoms and (2) there are side effects associated with some psychotropic medication—including suicidal thoughts and other health related problems.

YOU'VE DECIDED YOU NEED THERAPY, NOW WHAT?

You should be proud of yourself if you've decided to give yourself the gift of healing through therapy. Therapy is a powerful tool that can help with challenges you may be experiencing due to grief, relationship difficulties, depression, anxiety, trauma, divorce, phase of life changes, parenting, etc. Therapy's purpose is not to "fix" you. Therapy helps you gain insight and take an active role in creating the life you want.

Sometimes we need an unbiased, trained professional to offer us an alternate perspective on our lives, relationships and situations. Therapists don't *give* you answers to your problems, they assist you in creating your own solutions. Therapy helps you work through those times when you feel stuck. It's a healthy outlet that's available to you when you need it, as long as you feel it's necessary.

Before you begin your actual counseling sessions, your therapist will formulate treatment goals with you. These goals are designed to meet your specific need, based on your reasons for beginning treatment. After engaging in treatment and those goals are met, you and your therapist will discuss treatment termination, which is a mutual decision made between the therapist and client. A clinician's goal is to teach you positive coping skills so that you aren't in therapy long term. Should you need therapy later on down the line, for a different reason, you can begin again. It's called maintenance, mental maintenance—and it is nothing to be ashamed of.

BENEFITS OF COUNSELING AND THERAPY

- Reduction of stress
- Gain emotional balance
- A safe place to talk about trauma, depression and sadness
- Learn how to set healthy boundaries with others
- Improve communication skills
- Increase self esteem and confidence
- Identify reasons for stress, anxiety and depression
- Learn positive and healthy coping skills

CHOOSING AND PAYING FOR A THERAPIST

You should know that therapists can be referred to as clinicians, “psychs,” “shrinks,” social workers and doctors. Some titles are sometimes used interchangeably and what to choose can be confusing. It’s also important to note that clinical titles can vary across states. When trying to choose a clinician, you are highly encouraged to ask their level of education, training and experience so you can choose one that’s right for you. You can also inquire about their license—which typically means that they have an advanced degree, have passed a state licensing exam and have a certain number of hours of experience under their belt. Some clinicians have a specialty that they have chosen to get extra training in. All Masters level social workers, counselors and psychologists are generally trained to do basic therapy.

COMPARING DISCIPLINES AND TITLES WHEN CHOOSING A THERAPIST

Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) This is the name in California—it can vary across states. In general, anyone who has studied social work has been trained as a clinician who can provide individual therapy and group therapy—social workers are trained to understand the client’s individual behavior and reasoning as well as consider how they interact within their family unit, community and society at large. Social workers take a more holistic approach to their work—meaning, their efforts are to enhance the social functioning and overall well being of their clients. Licensed social workers should not be confused with child social workers who work in the child welfare sector. A licensed social worker must have the minimum of a master’s degree, several hours of practice hours (usually around 3,000) and is trained as a therapist.

Psychologists (PsyD and PhD) are trained to study normal and abnormal mental states by observing, interpreting and recording how individuals relate and their environments. Additionally, they are trained to conduct psychological testing and interpret data to provide a diagnosis.

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT), Licensed Marriage and Family Counselor (LMFC) depending on your state of residence. These titles have similar training in that they are licensed to practice and trained in matters related specifically to individual, couples and child therapy.

Psychiatrists/MD are trained medical doctors who can prescribe medication and spend most of their patient visits discussing client’s symptoms as they relate to medication management. It’s common for psychiatrists to work hand in hand with a licensed therapist in order to provide the patient to receive the best care when taking psychotropic medication.

Before considering a psychiatric evaluation for medication, consider doing some talk therapy first. Discuss the need and appropriateness for medication and a psychiatric referral. Your thera-

pist can make referrals and provide guidance in finding the appropriate professional who can evaluate you and prescribe medication.

For more information about mental health and mental illness, view the TED Talks and Mental Health tabs on my website www.nmwellnesslife.com as well as the National Alliance on Mental Illness's website at nami.org

For additional information about suicide prevention visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org

If you are having suicidal thoughts, immediately call the 24 hour

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-8255

THANK YOU

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for trusting me on your journey to self discovery and wellness and to my friends and family for their support. I hope that you gained something valuable that can add some light to your life. The more we love ourselves, the better the world becomes.

Be well and be good to each other.

With Love Always,

Natalie

“Choice is the most powerful tool we have. Everything boils down to choice. We exist in a field of infinite possibilities. Every choice we make shuts an infinite number of doors and opens an infinite number of doors. At any point we change the direction of our lives by a simple choice.

It is all in our hands, our hearts and our minds.” -Author Unknown

References

Avena, Rada, and Hoebel (2008) Evidence for sugar addiction: Behavioral and neurochemical effects of intermittent, excessive sugar intake. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Research* 32(1):20-39.

Ramnani et al. (2004) Prediction error for free monetary reward in the human prefrontal cortex. *NeuroImage* 23: 777-786

"McDonald's Hamburger Hell" Bloomberg Businessweek http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/03_09/b3822085_mz017.htm

Jonah Lehrer's piece on the neuroscience of McGriddles: http://scienceblogs.com/cortex/2009/07/the_neuroscience_of_mcgriddles.php

de Araujo, Oliveira-Maia, Sotnikova, Gainetdinov, Caron, Nicolelis and Simon (2008) Food Reward in the Absence of Taste Receptor Signaling. *Neuron*, Volume 57, Issue 6. 930-941

Samuel M. McClure, Jian Li, Damon Tomlin, Kim S. Cypert, Latané M. Montague, and P. Read Montague (2004). "Neural Correlates of Behavioral Preference for Culturally Familiar Drinks" *Neuron* 44 (2): 379-387

Volkow and Wise (2005) How can drug addiction help us understand obesity? *Nature Neuroscience* May;8(5):555-60.

niaaa.nih.gov

[consumer reports.org](http://consumerreports.org)

everydayhealth.com

mindbodygreen.com

webmd.com

draxe.com

choosemyplate.gov

heart.org

heathline.com

rethinkingdrinking.niaa.nih.gov

essentialoilhaven.com

sciencedaily.com

medicalnewstoday.com

bistromd.com

thebetterhealthstore.com

mayoclinic.org

mindful.org

livestrong.com

huffpost.com

ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

organicfacts.net

livestrong.com

health.harvard.edu

nimh.nih.gov

theartofcharm.com

healthline.com

up-nature.com

naha.org

momprepares.com

essentialoilhaven.com