Wellness

HANDBOOK

Support Your Body.
Enhance Your Health.
Feel Better.

By Joanna Garritano, MD
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Nurture Healing
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Wellness Handbook

Note from the author:

The wellness materials shared in this handbook are intended to empower you in your health. This handbook was developed using scientific research from the fields of nutrition, lifestyle medicine, mind-body medicine, and functional medicine. I created this handbook because I know personally what it is like to struggle with illness. As a patient, I often felt disempowered and had a sense that there was little I could do to change my fate. I have come to understand that, in fact, there is much that we can do to promote healing in our bodies and in our lives. Indeed, our bodies are incredibly resilient with the capacity to change, heal, and adapt. Even in those situations where an illness is irreversible, it does not have to define us or limit our joy, meaning and connection to others.

In traditional medical practice, we label and treat illness. This is certainly important, but it is an incomplete approach. When we focus just on treating illness, we often neglect to nurture healing and recovery in the body. A wellness-based approach is about learning to cultivate wellness in our bodies and in our lives. This can be done in addition to any treatments that we may need.

There are five pillars of wellness discussed in this manual: mindfulness, nutrition, relaxation, movement, and joy. Practicing these five pillars can help to promote greater health, and greater peace of mind, as you align with wellness.

Certainly, we cannot control everything that is (or isn't) going to happen in our bodies or in our lives. We can, however, make a positive impact and tip the scales toward wellness. What we do each and every day can either nurture healing within the body or contribute to illness and disease.

May the tools shared in this handbook provide you with comfort, support, and skills as you take steps toward greater well-being.

Yours in Wellness,
Joanna Garritano, MD
Wellness Handbook

Your body…

Your body is not a static structure. It is made up of an estimated 30 to 100 trillion cells that are constantly moving and changing. In each organ and in every tissue of the body, millions of old cells die and millions of new cells are created daily. This means that the physical body that you have today is not the same body you had 3 months ago. And… you will actually have a different body 3 months from now.

Now is when healing begins!

When you focus on specific, realistic, and positive actions to support wellness you can help your body most effectively renew, heal, and regenerate. The actions that you take each day will help you move, step by step, into greater wellness. This handbook is designed to help you identify a clear focus and create strategies to implement positive change.

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

Lao Tzu
Your body is a dynamic ecosystem.

Bodies thrive in certain conditions and struggle in others. Here are five fundamental pillars of wellness that can help you reduce inflammation, turn off the genes that contribute to illness, and grow a healthier body.

The Five Pillars of Wellness

1. Mindfulness as Medicine
2. Food as Medicine
3. Relaxation as Medicine
4. Movement as Medicine
5. Joy as Medicine
Aligning with wellness is about becoming an active participant in your health so that you can better restore balance in your body. And when you make healthful choices, it brings greater balance into the world. Greater balance allows you to more easily create the life that is most meaningful and beautiful to you regardless of the health challenge that you face. You have one brilliant and beautiful life. This is about living your life to the fullest. It is about giving yourself a precious gift – one that can only come from you.

**Focusing on wellness is about learning skills that can help you:**

- Feel better.
- Have more energy.
- Increase your vitality.
- Use nutrition to support your health.
- Improve your rate of healing and recovery.
- Balance your metabolism.
- Boost your immune function.
- Improve your digestion.
- Reduce stress, pain, and inflammation.
- Create healthy patterns and habits.
- Gain more balance, levity, and joy in your life.

“When you exhaust all possibilities, remember this: you haven’t.”

*Thomas Edison*
Shift the focus from Illness to Wellness

Often, when we don’t feel well, or when we face an illness, many of us turn to conventional medicine—and with good reason. There are many benefits, medications, and life-saving technologies offered in modern health care: insulin pumps, antibiotics, cardiac stents, open-heart surgery, dialysis, organ transplant, joint replacement, life support machines, and implantable devices. These things, and many more, are among the best of medicine’s contributions to humankind.

In some cases modern healthcare is enough. But there are many of us who need more than our current healthcare system is able to deliver. Despite the traditional medical management of illness and treatment of symptoms, we may still struggle, feel tired, be in pain, feel burdened by our health challenge, and feel unable to live life to the fullest. Or maybe we don’t feel well and our doctors simply don’t have the answers as to why.
Shift the Focus onto Wellness

In order to maximize wellness and recovery in the face of the majority of chronic health challenges, we may need more than just medications, treatments and procedures. We can shift our focus to include the idea of cultivating wellness in our bodies and in our lives. Focusing on wellness helps us to recognize that there are many things that we can do each day to influence our health.
Once we begin to focus on wellness, it shifts everything.

When we focus on wellness, we stop grasping for particular treatments, medications, or other potential fixes. We may still need to have treatments or use medicines, but we shift the way we are relating to our treatments. We begin to see that these things are only a part of the picture.

When we focus on creating wellness, we spend our time and energy finding the conditions in our lives that best serve healing, regeneration and renewal in the body. We become aware of all the ways that we can contribute to the potential of wellness, and empowered to shift the way we live to align with greater health.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

*Remember that it is entirely possible and, in fact, recommended to receive both appropriate medical management of a health problem AND at the same time actively cultivate the conditions in your life that bring greater health and wellbeing. This manual and the wellness programs or workshops are not a replacement for medical care. If you are presently receiving treatment for a medical condition, it is important to continue to receive medical management and treatment from your physician or health provider as necessary. If you are facing a particular diagnosis or a health challenge, let your physician know about any wellness-based changes that you implement. This is especially important for those who take medications because it may become necessary to reduce or eliminate some medications after implementing lifestyle changes (such as healthy dietary changes, relaxation techniques, stress reduction, and movement).*
Harness Your Energy to Serve Healing

If you are struggling with a health challenge, it is important to help your body dedicate its energy to the things that best promote healing and recovery.

In order to maximize healing, you can increase the supply of energy coming into the body and/or limit the things that demand and deplete energy. Let’s look at how you can alter both the supply of energy coming into the body and the demand of energy going out of the body.
Energy Supply – The energy coming into the body.

When you increase the supply of energy, more energy can be available to renew, regenerate, and heal.

Examples of things that increase the supply of energy at the level of the Body:

- Breath
- Water
- Nutrient-rich food
- Improving and maximizing digestion
- Sleep
- Movement
- Posture

Examples of things that increase the supply of energy at the level of the Mind:

- Being in nature
- Feeling inspired
- Practicing joy
- Cultivating meaning and purpose
- Feeling love and connection to others
- Mindfulness and meditation
Energy Demand – The energy used up, or lost, in the body.

Learn to conserve any wasted energy in the body so that it can be used for healing and recovery. This is about turning off the energy leaks.

Examples of things that drain or waste energy at the level of the Body:

- Nutrient-poor foods
- Processed foods filled with chemicals
- Ingested toxins
- Environmental toxins

Examples of things that drain or waste energy at the level of the Mind:

- Negative self-talk
- Suppressed emotions
- Patterns or habits of worry and stress
- Exposure to ongoing fear-based messaging
- Stress
- Excess busy-ness
- Lack of meaning, purpose and connection
The Basics: Adequate Water and Sleep

In addition to the five pillars of wellness, it is critical to get enough water, and to allow yourself adequate sleep.

**Water:** Drinking adequate water is a top priority. Providing your body with ample fresh water, to the tune of *at least* eight to ten, 8-ounce glasses per day properly hydrates the body.

While you are healing it is best to avoid sodas or sweetened drinks - (both sugar sweetened or artificially sweetened). People with the following health conditions may benefit from avoiding caffeine during their healing process: hypertension, heart disease, strokes, peripheral vascular disease, gastritis, gastro-esophageal reflux, heartburn, digestive problems, insomnia, disrupted sleep, or anxiety. Others may be able to tolerate a modest amount of caffeine in their diets.

It is important, however, to be mindful and intentional around your caffeine use. Caffeine is a stimulant. If you are using caffeine to give yourself energy or to get through the day, then your energy is not well balanced and you are placing unnecessary stress on your body. Added stress can contribute to illness or poor recovery. It is critical to understand how to better balance your body so that you are not dependent on stimulants.

*Enjoying a cup of coffee or caffeinated tea is different than being dependent on it.*

**Sleep:** When we have an adequate night’s rest we are better able to solve problems, be creative, have better concentration, and better self-control. It is estimated that almost ¾ of adults are sleep deprived with less than 6 hours of sleep per night. Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Sleep is a top priority. Do not compromise those hours of sleep, especially while you are healing!

Now, let’s take a closer look at the five wellness pillars.
The Five Pillars of Wellness
Wellness Pillar 1: Mindfulness as Medicine

Mindfulness is about becoming aware of your thoughts, emotions and actions. It is a practice of awareness. Mindfulness helps to inform and support the development of each of the other four pillars of wellness.

Mindfulness is about living life fully awake and aware of the thoughts, feeling, and actions that you are experiencing.

Practicing mindfulness helps you become a witness to your own internal dialog... the voice in your head that may be judging, striving, and grasping for something that you think you should have. This awareness allows you to have a little space between who you are at your core and all the thoughts that swim around in your mind.

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny compared to what lies within us.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Mindfulness gives you an opportunity to create wellness in the present moment. Creating health in the present moment - without an attachment to the outcome of what you want to happen someday - can radically shift your life.
Mindfulness helps you to align your actions and behaviors with what best supports your wellbeing RIGHT NOW.

This skill is about letting go of any need to try to control the future and instead focusing on where you are right now. Focusing on right now gives you strength, clarity, and greater insight. Too often we focus on where we want to be someday, what we want to get rid of, or where we do or don’t want to end up. In doing this we lose the power in the present moment. Instead, if we approach our present situation with an open mind, allow things to be as they are, and tune in to our senses (instead of the thoughts and judgments about what we are experiencing), we find that we have many options to how we can respond to the present moment. We become aware of the limitations of an isolated thought or idea, and gain greater perspective and choice.

The present moment is the only time we can grow and heal.
Joy, happiness, love, and the ability to feel alive can be found, remembered, and created regardless of your circumstances. Becoming mindfully aware, in regards to your health, is about:

- Becoming clear about what is happening in your body in the present moment.
- Active with regards to how you can best respond to your present conditions.
- And not caught up in future fears, worries or concerns about what you think a particular condition or diagnosis means.

Mindfulness as Medicine can be used to:

- Gain insight into the stories that drive you.
- Help you change your perception of stress to have a less damaging effect on your body.
- Better listen to, and understand, the needs of your body.
- Change disempowering patterns in your life.
- Find positive health promoting actions that are realistic and achievable regardless of how “large” or “small.”
- Release attachment to future outcomes and instead focus on the present moment.
When you become mindfully aware of the following things, you can more easily create resonance and harmony in your healing process:

1. What you think
2. What you feel
3. What you want
4. What you do

When you become mindfully aware of your thoughts (*what you think*), you can overcome limiting beliefs and more easily protect yourself from destructive thought patterns and the negative health consequences of stress.

By becoming mindfully aware of what you are experiencing in your body (*what you feel*), you are better able to recognize and meet the needs of your body. This is especially important during the healing process. Becoming mindfully aware of what you are feeling in the moment is about recognizing both physical and emotional feelings. When we are aware of what we are feeling, we have the opportunity to experience our emotions as opposed to judging, denying, or trying to suppress them.

When you become mindfully aware of *what you want*, you can learn to let go of attachment to particular outcomes, and instead actively choose a path of wellness that aligns you with the greatest degree of wellness in the present moment.

And when you become mindful about your actions (*what you do*), you can more easily recognize the patterns and habits that derail you from your highest intentions. This allows you to better align your actions in the present moment so that you can enhance your health and wellness regardless of your circumstances.

Mindfulness is a tool that can be applied to each of the four other wellness pillars. For example, with Food as Medicine, you can use mindfulness while you are eating and choosing the foods to nourish your body. With Relaxation as Medicine, you can use mindfulness to relax and learn how to reduce the negative impacts of stress on your body. With Movement as Medicine, mindfulness helps you become aware of your body’s need to move each day. And with Joy as Medicine, you can use mindfulness to intentionally find actions that bring more joy into your life.
Now, let’s look at the second of our five Pillars of Wellness.

“I have come to see the cultivation of mindfulness as a radical act – a radical act of sanity, of self-compassion, and ultimately, of love.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn
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Wellness Pillar 2: Food as Medicine

Today, there is much confusion and stress surrounding our food choices. We hear all sorts of advice such as: don’t eat gluten, eat only raw foods, cook your foods well, avoid sugar, go grain-free, eat more grains, eat more fish, fish contain toxins, eat macrobiotic, eat less, eat more, eat enough protein, don’t eat too much protein. There are over 45,000 books with divergent recommendations about nutrition and food on the market today.

*Life is already full of enough stress!*

**It is time to simplify.**

Using Food as Medicine is about cultivating a relationship with food that is grounded in simplicity, trust, balance and a return to joy.
It is important to realize that there is not one perfect diet to maximize health and recovery for every person or every health condition. A meal plan that would best promote health in a 60 year-old man with heart disease may be different than a meal plan for a 40 year-old woman with autoimmune disease. This may be different still from the meal plan needed to maximize wellness in a 6 year-old child with allergies. Each of our bodies are different. We must respect those differences and find what works best for our own bodies.

Note: If you would like individual guidance, you can visit nurturehealing.org/Food-As-Medicine-Program.

Although we all have some differences in our needs, there are principles around food that apply to us all.

Here are nine simple principles that can help to create a healthy relationship with food:

1. **Become aware about what you are putting into your body.**
   Many of us eat mindlessly, while we are either multi-tasking or in a rush. Develop a practice of really noticing the food that you are putting into your body. Mindful eating helps us to see that how we eat also matters. With each mouthful, we can practice love, joy, kindness, and peace.

2. **Stop judging yourself.**
   You do not have to label yourself as “good” if you eat one way and “bad” if you eat another. Focus instead on being informed about which foods promote health and wellness. From a place of awareness, you can begin to see your habits, behaviors, and choices around food.

3. **Go with good enough.**
   Don’t worrying about getting your diet perfect. Perfect does not exist. Go with good enough and commit to giving your body the best that you can. Start where you are.

4. **Fall in love with healthy, beautiful, natural, plant-based whole foods.**
   Eating a wide variety of predominantly plant-based whole foods is a powerful way to promote wellness, recovery and renewal in the body.

5. **Learn to trust your body.**
   When you choose healthy foods, your body will know how to use those...
6. **Learn to trust yourself.**
   If there is something that doesn’t agree with you, then don’t eat it. Your experience is valid regardless of what the “experts” think you should or shouldn’t eat.

7. **In each meal you have a choice.**
   You can choose to eat in a way that reduces suffering and promotes wellness in your own life and in the world. Much of the food on the market today is produced in a destructive way that can create harm in our bodies, harm to other beings, or harm to the planet itself. When we eat mindfully, we can make choices that promote equality, compassion, sustainability, and peace.

8. **Enjoy your food.**
   Joy helps to balance the autonomic nervous system away from the fight-or-flight stress response and into a rest-digest-heal mode. This improved balance will lead to better digestion of food and better absorption of nutrients so that you can maximize the benefits from food.

9. **Treat your body as a temple.**
   Choose delicious foods that serve healing and wellness your body.
Reconsider how you *think* about food.

Many people approach nutrition as if it were a chore. They focus on all the foods they must limit, reduce, or avoid. Unfortunately, this approach can lead to feelings of deprivation, resentment, and ultimately to a sense of failure.

**Instead of deprivation, we must reconsider what is normal, healthy and sane for our bodies.**

For hundreds of thousands of years of human life on this planet, we have eaten predominantly plant-based whole foods grown directly from the earth. In addition to plants, our ancestors also consumed lean, wild, or free-ranging animals and/or fish.

Now, we live in a society where the standard diet has strayed far from what our bodies actually need. Today’s “normal” diet is filled with highly processed, sugar-saturated, nutrient-deplete substances that come from factories. Many of us are habituated to, and often addicted to, poor quality, pseudo-foods. Additionally, the majority of meats and animal products that we have access to today are from unhealthy animals raised in poor conditions on filler-based improper foods, hormones, antibiotics and other chemicals. Even many of the vegetables and fruits on the market today are grown in imbalanced soil using unsustainable practices. These fruits and vegetables grown using poor practices actually contain less of the nutrients that our bodies need.
Consider this: many of the foods on the market today are radically different as compared to what our ancestors used to eat. Though there are many factors that contribute to the development of illness, there is undoubtedly a link between the modern diet and the current epidemic of chronic illnesses like cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disease, allergies, asthma, and many others.

Become mindful about the food going into your body.

Where does the food come from? How was it prepared? Where was it grown? Using food as medicine is about supplying the body with what it needs to generate health, wellness and vitality. And it is about reconnecting with the planet that sustains us all.

So What Should We Eat?

The Answer: Mostly Plants.

Why are plants so important?

Plants help to:

- Rebalance the gut microbiome (those good bacteria that live in our gastrointestinal tracts).
- Provide the body with a stable supply of building blocks to make hormones, enzymes, and neurochemicals in the body.
- Protect the body from environmental toxins, stressors, and infections.
- Help prevent and reverse chronic illness.
- Turn off the expression of the genes that contribute to chronic illness, pain, and inflammation.

Enjoy beautiful, natural, healthy foods made directly from nature.
The benefits you gain from eating predominantly plant-powered whole foods are:

1. Reduced inflammation
2. Improved energy
3. Improved digestion
4. Improved mood
5. Improved clarity of mind
6. Greater hormonal balance
7. Improved weight
8. Faster recovery and healing

Really? Plants can do all of that?

Yes! As mammals living on this planet, our bodies use the macro and micronutrients found in plants to heal, to grow, to regenerate, and to renew.
Foods to Include:

- Greens
- Vegetables/Fruits
- Energy-Dense Foods
- Clean Sources of Protein
- Healthy Fats

Foods to Limit or Avoid:

- Processed Foods
- Dairy (in certain individuals)
- Sugar and Sugar Substitutes
- Conventional Meats and Animal Products
- Gluten (in certain individuals)
- Fish that are High in Toxic Metals
Welcome to Super Clean!

*Remember that it doesn’t have to be perfect. And it doesn’t have to be all or none or forever. Healthy eating is a spectrum. This is NOT about being a strict Vegetarian or Vegan or following a Paleolithic diet or adhering to some confusing or strict protocol.

Eating predominantly plant-based whole foods is simply a way that you can powerfully trigger greater healing and wellness in your body right now. Depending on your health situation, you can tailor super clean eating to fit your needs.

*Simply start where you are today, and choose what is right for you in this moment.*

*Food as Medicine Tip: When buying foods, ask yourself, “Is this food still alive?” Or you can ask, “Is this food close to its alive form?” Vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, grains, and beans are all in the “still alive or close to alive” category. Buying foods as close as possible to being alive helps to supply your body with more of the nutrients it needs to heal.

Eating predominantly plant-based whole foods is a way of growing greater health and vitality in the body as well as reconnecting to greater wellness and sustainability on the planet. This is about recognizing how we are deeply connected to our food, to the environment, and to the planet. Our food choices every day really do matter.

The body responds quickly and dramatically to dietary changes that involve predominantly clean, plant-powered whole foods. There is evidence that with lifestyle modifications including diet, that the expression of hundreds of genes in the body can significantly change to reduce inflammation and promote wellness in as little as 3 months.¹

You might be amazed by how good you feel.

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¹ Ornish et. al. Proc Nat Acad Sci USA 2008: 105: 8369
The more you use clean plant-based whole foods as medicine, the greater the response in your body. Even those who think they already eat “healthy” can benefit.

**Healthy Eating is a Spectrum**

- **Very little plants**
  - Standard American Diet (SAD)
- **Predominantly plants**
  - Plant-Based Whole Foods Diet (PBWFD)

Most people who eat “Healthy” are here.
The closer you are on the end of the spectrum to eating predominantly plant-based whole foods, the bigger the benefit you are likely to experience, but even moderate dietary changes toward eating more whole foods is likely to lead to improvements in your health.

*Note: If you are taking medications (especially medications for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or hypertension) it is important to notify your health provider that you are implementing dietary changes. When people make significant dietary changes they often need to reduce, adjust, or eliminate certain medications. Medication adjustments should be done with the guidance of your physician.*

Eating a predominantly plant-powered whole foods diet is NOT hard... it simply takes some time to adjust. In the Food as Medicine Programs, we focus on how to make healthy eating enjoyable and easy. See the Nurture Healing Super Clean Food as Medicine Guide for more.
Here are a few final things to remember as you embark upon enjoying your food as medicine:

• If you are eating a plant-based whole foods diet, then you are less likely to need to “count calories.”
• If you are hungry, then eat plant-powered whole foods.
• Eat slowly, savor, and chew well.
• Eat a large variety of plants.
• Use the rich flavors of herbs and spices.
• Do not focus on all the things that you shouldn’t have.
• Do focus your attention on the beautiful, nutritious, whole foods that you are giving your body.
• Regardless of what you eat, find gratitude for the food on your plate, for this body that is yours, and for this opportunity to be alive.
• Enjoy your food.
• Drink plenty of water – at least 8 glasses per day.
• Eat regular meals. Try to eat at approximately the same time each day. This helps the body learn a rhythm of hunger and satiety and is an excellent way to help regulate the metabolism.
• Do not skip breakfast. Breaking the overnight fast with a nutritious breakfast promotes proper metabolism and can boost energy.
• Avoid heavy meals late in the day.
• Avoid late night snacking.
• Practice gratitude before and during meals. Remember that you are giving your body a precious gift.
• Practice mindfulness. Notice the colors, textures, smells, and flavors of the foods you eat.
• Experiment and try different things. Find out what kinds of health promoting foods you love.
• Relax and trust that your body will get the most out of your food.
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Wellness Pillar 3: Relaxation as Medicine

Protect Yourself from the Harmful Effects of Stress

We all have stress. Stress is a part of life. But, numerous studies have shown that stress can be incredibly damaging to the body. In fact, the evidence suggests that stress is a contributing factor in the development or worsening of the majority of chronic illnesses (those chronic health problems that affect nearly half of the adult population in the United States\(^2\)).\(^3\) So what do we do? How can we protect ourselves from the harmful effects of stress? And for those of us who face a health challenge, how can we enhance our health and recovery in the face life’s inevitable stressors?

**Answer: Rebalance the Nervous System**


Relaxation as Medicine is about creating a better **balance** in the nervous system... specifically the autonomic nervous system. Balance in the nervous system is a **key** to a healthy functioning body.

Once you understand what a profound difference this balance can make in your health and wellness, you become empowered to take the steps that can help your body heal.

**What Exactly is the Autonomic Nervous System?**

The autonomic nervous system (ANS) is what controls all of the organs and systems in the body – things like digestion, heart rate, breathing, skin temperature, and metabolism.
There are two branches of the Autonomic Nervous System:

1. The sympathetic nervous system, also known as the “fight or flight system.”
2. The parasympathetic nervous system, known as the “rest and digest system.”

We need both of these systems!

These two branches of the ANS are like “stop” and “go” buttons for the various functions in our organs. Problems arise when we have ongoing, perpetual, or unbalanced stress because stress over-stimulates the sympathetic system and shuts down the parasympathetic system. This throws the entire body off balance resulting in a decreased healing capacity, as well as creating cycles of inflammation and deregulation.

Rebalancing the nervous system promotes proper healing, digestion, regeneration of tissues, and functioning of the body’s organ systems.

How do we create balance?

**Answer: One way is to Practice Relaxation as Medicine**

Relaxation techniques activate the parasympathetic system through the relaxation response and this simultaneously quiets the sympathetic nervous system. All of this can reestablish balance in the nervous system and even alter the expression of various genes in the body that are involved in regulating healing, regeneration, longevity, and the body’s repair mechanisms. Relaxation enhances the body’s capacity to heal in very tangible, measurable and real ways. Here are some of the positive effects in the body: improving the immune system’s ability to fight infections and tumor cells, decreasing the blood pressure and the stress load on the cardiovascular system, making the blood less likely to abnormally clot, decreasing inflammation, decreasing pain, improving neurotransmitter regulation, improving digestion, decreasing cortisol, decreasing oxidative stress on the body, improving neurogenesis and neuroplasticity, improving glucose regulation, increasing DNA stability, and improving cellular regeneration.⁴

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Here are examples of ways to practice relaxation:

- Meditating.
- Using guided imagery.
- Being in nature.
- Going for a walk.
- Listening to music.
- Reducing to-do lists.
- Unplugging from technology.
- Deliberately seeking moments of joy and gratitude.
- Slowing down and savoring meals.
- Using Yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong, or other expressive meditations or movement practices.
- Practicing mindfulness in the moment and finding joy or peace in the simple routines that make up the day-to-day aspects of life.
- Shifting the underlying tone of resistance in life by letting go of an attachment to an idea that life should be a certain way. This is about finding acceptance for the conditions of THIS MOMENT.
- Shifting the way we think about stress to see ourselves as capable of rising to our challenges, and to find meaning despite a hardship.
- Getting connected in community to find the necessary support.
- Immersing yourself in an activity you that you love.

“Peace is not something you can force on anything or anyone... much less upon one’s own mind. It is like trying to quiet the ocean by pressing upon the waves. Sanity lies in somehow opening to the chaos, allowing anxiety, moving deeply into the waves, where underneath, within, peace simply is.”

Gerald May

The next Pillar of Wellness we will explore is Movement as Medicine.
Wellness Pillar 4: Movement as Medicine

This wellness pillar is simple: move your body.

Movement helps to reset the nervous system, the hormonal axis in the body, the gastro-intestinal system, and the immune system. Movement also causes the release of endorphins, hormones, and other neuropeptides in the body. Incredibly, exercise even stimulates the formation of new blood vessels through a process called angiogenesis and the release of hormonal and peptide messengers in the body that stimulate regeneration, growth and renewal. And movement stimulates the mitochondria in the body to help you make more energy.

Moving your body with some form of exercise helps you to:

- Reach an ideal weight.
- Reduce the risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and many forms of cancer.
- Improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Increase overall energy.
- Manage symptoms in many different chronic illnesses.
- Reduce the perception of pain.
- Strengthen bones and muscles.
- Improve mental health.
- Enhance sex life.
- Increase the chances of living longer.
- Promote proper sleep.
- Boost mood and improves anxiety and/or depression.
- Protect the body from the harmful effects of stress.
- Prevent cognitive decline.
- Sharpen memory.
- Control addictions.
- Promote creativity.
Movement is good for your brain.

Exercise not only changes the structure of the body, but it also changes the structure and the function of the brain. Through a process called neurogenesis (the creation of new brain cells) and neuroplasticity (the creation of new connections between brain cells), exercise actually increases both the brain’s size and cognitive performance. But even more than increasing the number of brain cells, exercise also increases the production of neurotransmitters and nerve growth factor levels, as well as the formation of new blood vessels in the brain.
Guiding principles for Movement as Medicine:

- **Do something.**
  A little movement is better than nothing. EVERYTHING COUNTS!

- **Try different things with an open mind.**
  Walking, swimming, dancing, riding a bike, or taking an exercise or yoga class.

- **Get Creative.**
  Try walking through the mall if you like shopping. Go outdoors somewhere scenic if you like nature. Exercise with a friend. Listen to music while you move.

- **Be kind to yourself.**
  Do not judge yourself or beat yourself up about your current fitness level. Notice any unhealthy choices and consider them as opportunities to learn and grow.

- **Take your time.**
  Do not expect to run a marathon overnight. Enjoy where you are in the process and congratulate yourself for getting out there and moving.

- **Start where you are.**
  If you need to build up slowly, then do so. Short 5, 10, or 15-minute bursts of activity can add up.

- **Listen to your body.**
  If something begins to hurt then stop. Do not “power-through” pain.

- **Don’t force yourself.**
  It is not productive to force yourself to do monotonous or painful activities that you dislike.

- **Get medical clearance.**
  Talk to your doctor prior to beginning an exercise program if you have any health concerns.
How much movement is enough to have a positive impact on physical, mental, and emotional health?

Answer: A minimum of two to three hours per week of movement that aerobically stimulates the body (i.e. gets the heart rate up). This can be 30 minutes 5 days per week, or 45 minutes 3 days per week, or even smaller bursts of 15 minutes twice per day.

We all know that exercise is good for us, right?

If knowing were enough, we’d all be in great shape! It takes more than knowing to make movement a habit. Many people struggle to establish a regular exercise routine despite the best of intentions. You need the right mindset and a plan that you are willing to commit to.

“Knowing is not enough: we must apply. Willing is not enough: we must do.”
Goethe
The key to making a positive change is to focus on finding ways to enhance your life and to do more of what you love.

When you become mindfully aware of the gift of your body and of this opportunity to be alive, and you focus on doing what you love, movement becomes a joy.

Do Yoga, Qigong, and Tai Chi count?

Absolutely! These are wonderful ways to move the body. These types of movements have a different effect upon the body as compared with the aerobic type of exercise. These more meditative type movements help to balance the nervous system by cultivating a relaxation response in the body and are a nice addition to an aerobic routine. Ideally both the meditative movements and the aerobic movements can both be used to maximize the effects of Movement as Medicine.

Movement is an opportunity to practice mindfulness. When using Movement as Medicine, focus on the following:

1. Choose something you enjoy doing.
   This is key. The more you enjoy it, the more motivated you will be to consistently do it. Alternatively, you can pair movement with something you
enjoy. For example: take photographs on a beautiful walk, listen to an audio recording or music while you move, or find a partner who will move with you.

2. **Be mindful about the way you speak about exercise.**
   Use language that helps you recognize that movement is an opportunity and a privilege, not a chore. For example, instead of saying, “I have to go for a walk today,” choose to say, “I’m so lucky, I am able to go for a walk today.”

3. **Establish a new pattern with triggers or rituals that will help you form a new habit.**
   For example, you can use regular reminders that generate an automatic reaction to get you moving. For example, set a daily alarm on your phone. When the alarm goes off, you head out the door for your walk. Or regularly stop at the park on your drive home from work.

4. **Give yourself a reward for exercising.**
   This is best something NOT related to food. Daily rewards could be a foot massage, a warm bath, time in a sauna or steam room, time to apply a new body lotion or oil. After a week or so of successful movement, consider treating yourself to something you enjoy like a professional massage. After a movement habit is firmly established, the reward simply becomes the activity itself.

5. **Schedule your movement time.**
   Schedule movement into your calendar each week as if it were an important appointment or meeting. An excellent way to do this is to schedule a class or join a group. Commit to it. But be sure not to over-schedule or over-commit. Start with something you know you can achieve and then enjoy the feeling of success.

**Remember: your body was made to move.**
Wellness Pillar 5: Joy as Medicine

Using Joy as Medicine is about connecting to what you love and to what makes you feel most alive.

Many of us have adapted to a great deal of pain, discomfort, stress and anxiety in our lives. In many cases, these things have become the “norm.” However, there is ample evidence to suggest that stress and social isolation are contributing factors in the development of illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, infections, and autoimmune disease.\(^5\),\(^6\),\(^7\),\(^8\),\(^9\)

We may be able to protect our bodies from some of the harmful effects of stress by actively practicing joy.

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When we practice joy, we can shift the biochemistry in our bodies to better support wellness and healing. The data even suggests that performing acts of kindness, receiving acts of kindness, and simply witnessing acts of kindness can actually help the immune system function better.\(^\text{10}\)

**How do feelings of joy help the body heal?**

When we feel good, there is a release of neuropeptides in the blood stream.

Endorphins, serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin are all considered the “feel good” neuropeptides. Endorphins are best known as the body’s natural pain reliever or opioid. However, neuropeptides such as the endorphins do much more than simply relieve pain. These neuropeptides also help to enhance the immune system, relieve stress, release sex hormones, moderate appetite, and help us feel a general sense of wellness and pleasure.

**Here is an interesting fact:**

The amount of neuropeptides in the body is not static. The body can increase or decrease the production, storage and release of these peptide messengers based on supply, feedback, and demand. This means that it is possible for you to *boost* the body’s “feel good” messengers. This can help you reduce pain, improve your immune response, balance your hormones, moderate your metabolism, increase your energy, and generally help you feel better.

Positive Feedback Loops

The body receives message to make more of the feel good neuropeptides by using positive feedback loops. For example, when you naturally activate your body to release endorphins, then your body is stimulated to make more endorphins to meet the demand.
Here are examples of things that stimulate the body to make more feel-good endorphins:

- Cardiovascular Exercise
- Laughter
- Smiling
- Meditation
- Spicy Food
- Chocolate
- Being Outdoors
- Sunshine
- Orgasm
- Massage or Body Work
- Music
- Pleasant Aromas
- Acupuncture
- Deep Breathing
- Movement
- Doing things and being with people that you enjoy

Cultivating wellness through deliberately creating joy, love, connection, compassion, kindness, laughter, and gratitude are ways of helping ourselves intentionally feel good.

Just as exercising the muscles makes them stronger, exercising our ability to notice and experience good feelings in our lives, helps to make those experiences more readily accessible, more frequent, and ultimately more available to us.
The following are three ways of bringing more joy into the flow of your life:

1. **Bringing your awareness to the good that is already present in your life.**
   This is a mindfulness practice of becoming aware of all that you have in your life to be grateful for.

2. **Doing more of what makes you feel most alive.**
   This practice is about intentionally making time to do more of the things that bring you joy.

3. **Finding meaning and growth even in hardships.**
   We cannot always control our circumstances. However, we can decide who we will be in the face of the challenges and difficulties in our lives. We can actively decide to practice joy in spite of our challenges.
Here are a few ideas of ways to practice Joy as Medicine. (The possibilities here are endless.)

- Create a gratitude or joyfulness journal.
- Practice a small act of kindness every day.
- Develop a mindfulness practice where you stop to savor a special exchange with another: a warm glance, a hug, or a kindness.
- Spend time in nature.
- Create a daily ritual that helps you feel good. (For example: give yourself a foot massage, light a candle, or savor a cup of tea.)
- Take a yoga or exercise class.
- Engage in something creative that can help you express yourself.
- Notice the beauty and life that is all around you.
- Try something that you have always wanted to do.
- Make time to laugh.
- Meditate.
- Practice smiling.
- Look up at the night sky.
- Get in community – join a group of others with similar interests.
- Bring home flowers.
- Play music.
- Go for a walk.
- Have a meal with someone you care about.
- Spend time with a child.
- Comfort someone in need
- Donate food to those in need.
- Take care of an animal.
- Feel the warm beach sand between your toes.
- Dance.
- Say thank you.
- Enjoy the sunshine.
A practice of joy can be confusing in our consumer driven world where we are exposed to advertising that equates pleasure with fast food, candy, a product, or a possession. Joy, however, is something vastly different than superficial surface pleasures. Joy is tied to our core wellbeing. Joy is not something that someone else can give to you.

Joy is something that comes from within.

And joy can be created irrespective of external circumstances.

When we practice joy, we can shift from experiencing fleeting emotional pleasures that are dependent on activities, people, or circumstances in our lives, to embodying a joyful state of being regardless of our situation.

“Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass. It’s about learning how to dance in the rain.”

Vivian Green

Now that we have discussed all five wellness pillars, let’s bring it into practice by aligning with wellness.
Wellness Handbook
Wellness Alignment

Modern living is filled with many conveniences, inventions, and entertainments. Many of these things greatly improve the quality of our lives. And yet, our current way living is greatly out of balance. The imbalances of modern life have affected the health of our bodies, the health of our societies, the health of our ecosystems, as well as the health of the planet as a whole. From the water supply, to the air we breathe, to the way our foods are grown, to the stress we are under, we are connected to what is happening around and within us.

It is possible to bring greater balance into our lives by aligning with what produces health and wellness.

There is no one else who is going to be able to do this for you.

The choices we make each day matter.

It is up to each of us to find our inner strength, to support one another, and to help ourselves - and one another - find the conditions that restore greater wellbeing in our bodies and in our world.

The Weekly Wellness Alignment Plan on page 57 is a tool that can help you create greater balance. You can use this tool each week to take positive steps that provide the conditions in your body for greater health and wellness to take root and grow.
A Wellness Alignment Plan can help you stay committed to your health and move forward in your wellness.

Try to make a wellness plan to guide you each week. Some weeks you may be able to make what feels like big strides, and other weeks, smaller ones. Some weeks you may want to have a plan for each of the 5 Wellness Pillars, and other weeks you may want to focus your energy on one bigger concept within one of the pillars. The Weekly Wellness Alignment Plan allows you to fine tune your wellness plan so that it fits your unique needs and is right for you.

Regardless of the specifics of what you focus on for each wellness pillar, what is most important is that you revisit and consider your Wellness Alignment Plan each week so that it remains at the top of your mind.

Decide on a visible place in your life where you can keep a copy of the Weekly Wellness Alignment Plan. Find support and share your Wellness Alignment Plan with others. This will help you stay accountable to your weekly commitments.

On the following page you will find a template you can use to make your Wellness Alignment Plan.
Wellness Alignment Plan

Write down specific actions that you will commit to this week.

1. Mindfulness as Medicine

2. Food as Medicine

3. Relaxation as Medicine

4. Movement as Medicine

5. Joy as Medicine
Realize that you are never too old, too weak, or too sick to begin. The strategies and skills shared in this wellness handbook can help you to create a clear focus that empowers you in your wellness. And remember: while there are many things that you can do to influence the health of your body, you cannot make your body be healthy. Healing is a process, not a destination. Thus, “success” and “failure” do not apply. We must not judge ourselves for the outcomes that we experience. Instead, we must suspend judgment and open to the journey as it unfolds. Healing means listening deeply and finding wholeness in our lives in whatever form it takes.

**Above all else, remember that this moment is enough.**


**This is your one precious life.**

How will you choose to live today?
References

In creating the Wellness Handbook, I have made every effort to distill a great depth and breadth of medical and health related information into an easy-to-access format so that it could become both practical and usable. The following references (in alphabetical order by author’s last name) are some excellent resources for those who may want to explore a topic in greater depth.

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63. Weil, Andrew. *Spontaneous Healing*
I believe that regardless of our situation, we can find ways to enhance our wellbeing and enrich our lives.

My name is Joanna Garritano and I am physician committed to helping people maximize their health so they can feel better and live their lives to the fullest. I offer workshop and programs that focus on creating greater health and wellness and use strategies to increase energy, enhance recovery, improve immune function, and support healing. This approach focuses on cultivating greater wellness of the body, mind, and spirit.

My goal is to empower people by helping them focus on the things that they can do in their lives that are the most likely to make positive shifts in their overall well-being. I work with individuals to create a positive health impact using nutritional support, movement, meditation, relaxation, mindfulness, emotional support, enhanced joy, laughter and connection in community to further enhance wellbeing. This work is about supporting, educating, and inspiring individuals to become active participants in creating greater wellness in their lives.

I believe that we are all intimately connected to the world around us. When we align ourselves with greater health and wellness, then we bring greater health and wellness into the world. Every move toward greater wellness matters. Thank you for making wellness a priority.
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Wellness Handbook