GREG CONNOR

7 GOLDMINE HABITS OF LONGEVITY

Slow Down the Aging Process, Boost Mental and Physical Health, and Get Back to Young and Successful Living with the Ultimate Anti-Aging Plan

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Introduction

Are you tired of feeling exhausted and mentally drained all the time? Is the thought of getting older always in the back of your mind? Do you wish to live a healthy lifestyle, but don't know where to start? Then you've come to the right place.

This book will provide a step-by-step guide towards improving your physical and mental health so you can feel younger and happier than ever. Here, you will learn about the basics of nutrition, different diets that promote well-being, and tips on how to make better nutritional choices. You will discover the importance of staying hydrated and drinking the right amount of water at the right time of day. I will introduce you to detoxifying, and how you can implement it correctly to help your body flush out the harmful toxins and impurities that impact you.

This book will help you understand the link between health and being physically active while also providing exercise plans to rejuvenate and re-energize your body. On a similar note, this guide touches on the importance of keeping your mind active and how you can build up your cognitive ability with the help of specific exercises. It will cover the necessity of getting healthy sleep and how to improve the quality and duration of your nightly rest. Finally, this book will discuss stress and anxiety problems and how you can efficiently manage them through relaxation techniques.

My name is Greg Connor, and I'm a health enthusiast. I come from a family where natural, healthy eating held great importance. From an early age, I enjoyed helping my grandma gather herbs for her studies and went with my parents on hiking trips. I always regarded nature with awe and respect, and I grew up in an environment that promoted the idea of a "healthy body, healthy mind." But even back then, I wondered, "How does one live a long, happy and healthy life? What makes something good or bad for us?"

As I grew up, I sought to learn more and more about health, and I supplemented my findings with the lessons I had learned at home. Various studies on longevity reinforced my beliefs on the importance of clean eating, staying active, and living a happy life, but they also introduced me to new techniques and theories. Whatever seemed interesting and promising, I put it into practice. Through trial and error, I selected ideas and principles that worked for me and showed results. As a husband and a father, I wanted my family to follow my findings, too, so we could all be healthy and happy. Now, I'm 59 years old, and I don't feel or look a day over 45. I'm still the same Greg that can go on a full four miles hike without breaking a sweat, and I've yet to succumb to the memory issues of old age. I wrote this book mainly because people always ask me how I look so young and stay healthy. If I have this knowledge, why not share it? It's much simpler to redirect someone to my written material than explain the same old story to every individual. This book is a passion project and a way to help others live a long, happy, and energetic life. I tried to synthesize what I have learned over the years in a simple, comprehensive, and accessible way, so anyone can find practices that work for them and that they can implement in their lives.

By trying the techniques and tips in this book, you, and the people around you, will notice the changes. You will see for yourself that your life's quality has improved and that these simple but effective practices have had a positive impact on your overall health. This book will present many methods, ideas, techniques, and recommendations. Everyone can find something that resonates, which might help them accomplish goals, as long as there is a follow-through. It is also important to notice that the best time to change your life is NOW. There is no time like the present, and the more time you waste hesitating or finding excuses, you lose the possibility of finding your best self. We all deserve to live a healthy, happy life, so don't postpone the beginning of a new, better stage of your life. And don't keep this knowledge to yourself! Share it with your family, friends, and especially with the young people in your life. With all the crazy diets and misinformation

out there, they desperately need health and guidance to ensure that they grow up to be happy, responsible adults.

Are you ready to find out the secrets to living a long, healthy, happy life? Are you prepared to feel more energetic than you've felt in a long time? Some tips in this book could appeal to you so quickly with their efficiency that you will hopefully integrate them in your day-to-day life and never stop improving your and your family's well-being.

Chapter 1
Nutrition Principles that Everyone Should Know

Food is one of the most important factors that influence our overall health and longevity. It is the fuel that keeps our bodies going, and, much like cars, low-quality fuel can damage our "engines" pretty quickly. Learning and following nutrition principles will allow your body to function like a well-oiled machine regardless of time passing. Don't just take my word for it. There's plenty of scientific data that shows the importance of eating right.

For example, a study measured the levels of vitamin C in the bloodstream of its test subjects to determine whether healthy eating habits influenced mortality risks. Scientists consider vitamin C to be a good telltale sign of vegetal food intake, which is a significant part of a healthy diet. So, high levels of vitamin C in the blood are a testament to healthy eating habits. This study found that the mortality risks of people with high vitamin C levels were equal to those of people 14 years their juniors (Nutrition Facts.Org, 2020).

Then, we have the mitochondrial and genetic theories of aging. The first theory alleges that the cellular damage from the mitochondria's gradual loss of function causes aging. We find these rod-shaped organelles in our cells, serving as power generators, keeping our cells alive and thriving. Naturally, if the mitochondria are compromised, the cells suffer too. The slow degradation of the cells is scientifically known as oxidation.

To put it in perspective, think of an apple that was sliced and left somewhere unattended. After some time, it gets brown and spoils. That is oxidation. The same thing happens in our bodies because of the action of various substances, as well as the simple passage of time (getting older). For example, free radicals are oxygen-containing molecules that come from external sources such as chemicals and pollutants that damage

cells, proteins, and lipids. However, there are also substances with antioxidant properties that slow down this process, helping our cells stay vigorous and strong for longer periods (Lobo et al., 2010). You'll find antioxidants in foods such as vegetables, fruits, herbs, and spices, the staples of a healthy diet, while very few antioxidant substances are found in animal-based products.

The genetic theory of aging is more complex, but I'll do my best to explain it. Our DNA is made out of chains of chromosomes, and they have tiny caps on their tips called telomeres. The telomeres get shorter and shorter each time our cells divide, starting with the day we are born and ending upon our demise. Allegedly, the length of our telomeres functions as a biological clock, telling us how much time we have left until our last cell division. And again, according to recent findings, a diet rich in antioxidant foods, whole grains, vitamins, and minerals is associated with longer telomeres while the frequent consumption of processed meats and fatty foods is linked with shorter telomeres (Vidacek et al., 2017).

Now that we looked at the science that backs up the link between nutrition and longevity let's dive into the basic principles of nutrition and learn the proper techniques to establish healthy eating habits.

Food Portions and Basic Nutrition Notions

Balanced diet

A crucial part of improving the way you eat is understanding how much food you need to feel happy and satiated. We are all unique individuals with specific dietary needs that vary according to our age, gender, and lifestyle. Because food labels can be hard to decipher, and it's tricky to keep track of how many calories we consume, it's very easy to mismanage our hunger and fall into unhealthy eating habits. Therefore, let's cover some basics on portions, reading labels, and general dietary guidelines, and then we'll get to the practical tips on how to manage hunger healthily.

First, you must understand the difference between portions and servings. A portion refers to the amount of food we eat at a time, from a specific meal or packaging. A serving is the amount of food listed on a product's label, and we can measure it in ounces, grams, cups, slices, and so on, depending on the product. This serving size presented on the food label is usually the amount that's recommended to consume at one time. Depending on your dietary needs, a serving size may or may not represent your recommended portion. Also, because

the number of calories on a food label is calculated for the specified serving size, you need to pay attention to how many servings you consume to keep track of the calories you're consuming. For example, the serving size for a container of ice cream can be ⅔ cup, with 240 calories per serving., However, if your portion of choice is 1 1/3 cups, then you're taking in 480 calories.

You should decide your perfect portion according to your age, gender, weight, activity level, and metabolism. Your daily calorie intake should also vary depending on whether you want to lose, gain, or maintain your current weight. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans present the following estimates, based on energy requirements and other factors:

- Males (ages 36-40) - 2,400 calories per day if they are sedentary; 2,600 calories per day if they are moderately active, and 2,800 calories per day if they are active.
- Females (ages 36-40) - 1,800 calories per day if they are sedentary; 2,000 calories per day if they are moderately active, and 2,200 calories per day if they are active.

These values stay constant for men until they reach the age of 61, then the minimum drops to 2,000 calories per day with a maximum of 2,600 calories per day. The maximum drops again to 2,400 for men above the age of 76. For women over the age of 51, the minimum caloric intake drops to 1,600, and for ages 60 and up, the maximum also goes down to 2,000. These estimates remain the same for women above the age of 76. Don't forget that these values are just estimates and that you need to adapt your caloric intake according to your particular dietary needs. For this, you can consult a nutritionist or use the Body Weight Planner offered by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases to get a better grasp on how much food you need daily.

Second, you need to pay close attention to food labels because they contain important information about the food you want to eat. Product labels let you know what components are included in a serving, from fat to carbohydrates, sodium, and proteins. As I've mentioned before, it's hard to understand from a food label what's good and what's bad for you, thus

making it difficult for consumers to pick healthy products. But you can improve your diet by following some simple rules when scouring food labels (Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, 2020):

- Avoid products with a lot of saturated fats and trans fats - these are unhealthy fats found in cheese, butter, and red meats. They are associated with weight gain and heart disease.
- Watch out for added sugars - these are different sugars (corn syrup, malt syrup, honey, table sugar, fructose, artificial sweeteners, etc.) that have been added to food products. Products with a lot of added sugars are high in calories, without meeting nutritional needs.
- Keep sodium in check - a diet rich in salt can lead to high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease.
- Prioritize nutrients like dietary fibers, potassium, vitamin D, calcium, and iron - these are categorized as “nutrients to get more of” on the Food & Drug Administration site, as they promote healthy cholesterol and blood glucose levels and reduce the risks of developing deficiencies and circulatory diseases.
- Be mindful about the percent daily value (%DV) - this value helps you work out if a serving of food is low or high in a specific nutrient. You calculate this percentage for a serving of food, telling you how much that serving will contribute to your daily dietary needs. A 5% DV is low, while a 20% DV is high. You want to choose foods with a high %DV for dietary fibers and the other nutrients I mentioned in point four, and a low %DV for added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. Protein, trans fat, and total sugar don’t have a %DV.

Besides becoming more aware of food labels, you need to know some basic dietary guidelines. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, a healthy diet consists of:

- A good variety of vegetables such as starchy vegetables (corn, carrots, potatoes, pumpkin, sweet potatoes,

butternut squash), legumes (black beans, kidney beans, lentils, chickpeas), and leafy greens (kale, spinach, cabbage, arugula).

- Plenty of fruits, with a focus on whole fruits such as apples, bananas, apricots, blueberries, cherries, cranberries, pineapple, and prunes.
- A wide variety of proteins from lean meats, eggs, legumes, seafood, nuts, seeds, and soy products.
- Low-fat or even fat-free dairy products, including yogurt, cheese, and milk.
- Healthy fats from avocado, fatty fish (salmon, herring, mackerel), nuts, and olive oil.
- Similarly, to have a healthy diet, you should avoid processed foods (pizza, soft drinks, fries, chips, chicken nuggets, pasties, candies, etc.), products high in saturated and trans fats (butter, fatty meats, tropical oils, especially palm oil and coconut oil), and any foods lathered with added sugars (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017).

And lastly, some great ways of managing your hunger without overeating or starving include:

- Try always to make half of your plate non-starchy vegetables- they are low in calories, but they have plenty of fiber and water to give you that sense of feeling satiated.
- When eating something, try to follow the serving sizes by putting the food on or in a plate/bowl instead of taking it straight from its container.
- Include lean proteins (poultry, fish, dairy) and plant-based proteins (beans, nut butter) in your meals and snacks - they are more filling than carbs or fats.
- Use smaller plates, spoons, forks, and glasses to help you with your portions.
- Avoid eating when you're engaged in some other activity such as watching TV or driving - if you're distracted, you

are more likely to overeat.

- Don’t be a fast eater - it’s better to take your time and chew a bit slower, to enjoy the food, and give your brain the time to perceive your hunger as being satiated.
- Enjoy healthy snacks such as fruits or veggies with an added hint of nut butter for extra flavor.
- Include soluble fibers such as chia seeds, oatmeal, flax seeds, beans, and pears into your diet because they help manage hunger and keep you feeling full and happy.

With our bases covered, let’s now look at a few specific dietary practices, focusing on what they comprise and the advantages they bring to overall health.

Alkaline and Acidic Foods

To understand the concept of alkalinity and acidity, we must first speak about pH. The pH value of something tells you if a substance is an acid, neutral, or a base. The pH scale goes from zero to 14, with the middle value (seven) being neutral. Values below seven are acidic, and values above seven are basic or alkaline. For example, the gastric acid that’s in our stomach has a pH of 3.5, which allows it to digest the food we’re eating. Our blood has a pH value of 7.35 -7.45, which is the tiniest bit on the alkaline side.

Just like different parts of our body have distinct pH values, different foods can be classified as either acidic or alkaline. If you eat high-acidic foods, you’ll have more acidity in your body, while a mainly alkaline diet is said to promote good health. The reason alkaline is the way to go for nutrition becomes apparent once we look at the pH- based classification of foods.

High-acidic foods include fish, some dairy products, meat (especially processed ones like corned beef, minced meat, and canned meat), grains, eggs, sugar, sodas and concentrated beverages, processed foods in general, alcohol, and high-protein foods. Some fruits that have a high acidic content are limes, lemons, grapes, blueberries, pineapples, peaches, oranges, and grapes. An important note here is that, although

these fruits are acidic, if you don't have gastrointestinal problems such as reflux or an ulcer (which the high acidity of the gastric juices causes), they are healthy foods to eat daily. Strangely enough, although they are initially acidic, their effect on the body is alkalizing.

High-alkaline foods are mainly vegetables, legumes (beans and lentils), fruits, herbs and spices, healthy fats, whole grains, herbal teas, and nuts, which are basically the staple food categories of a healthy diet. The scientific consensus is that an alkaline diet is favorable because it promotes the consumption of unprocessed and whole foods, and it restricts the intake of junk food (Leech, 2019).

Speculations linking high-acidic diets with osteoporosis, cancer, and a general state of being unhealthy or vulnerable have yet to be proven through scientific methods. The same goes for the claims that an alkaline diet can cure health issues and prevent diseases.

The takeaway out here is not to relinquish all acidic foods, but to implement basic nutrition guidelines such as restricting your processed foods intake and including vegetables and fruits in your daily meals. But if you have problems with acidity, then perhaps an alkaline diet is worth the commitment.

Animal Protein vs. Plant Protein

Protein is an essential nutrient that you should not overlook in a healthy diet. What makes it so important is that it is made up of amino acids. Out of the 22 amino acids that human bodies need to function properly, our bodies can't produce nine. We call these essential amino acids, and we can only take them from the protein-rich food we eat. And yet, if you're not a bodybuilder or professional athlete, the popular advice is to keep your protein intake on the down-low. The dietary reference for daily protein intake is a meager 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight (Pendick, 2018). To put that in perspective, a sedentary woman who weighs about 140 pounds should eat around 53 grams of protein in a day, just to meet the minimum amount required for optimal health. But that still

does not answer the question of how much protein we actually need and where we should find it.

During the Protein Summit, an event where over 40 nutrition scientists analyzed the "protein problem," it was concluded that Americans don't eat enough protein. The population should aim to consume twice the amount recommended by the dietary allowance (Pendick, 2018). About 15-25% (depending on age, sex, weight, and so on) of your daily calories should come from proteins with a focus on eating healthy, protein-rich foods. So, that settles the "how," but we still have the "where" to worry about. When it comes to the source, we find protein in both animal foods and plant foods. Let's look at both types of proteins.

We consider food to be a "complete source of protein" if it contains all of the nine essential amino acids that humans can't produce. From this point of view, we can say that animal protein has the upper hand. Foods such as fish, dairy products (milk and cheese), eggs, red meat (from cows and deer), and poultry (turkey and chicken) are complete sources of protein while most plant-based proteins are lacking at least one of those nine essentials. We can consider very few plant foods such as buckwheat, soy, and quinoa, complete sources of protein. Thus, vegans and vegetarians must be very cautious with their protein intake to ensure they won't develop any amino-acid deficiencies. Scientific proof shows that plant-based complete protein sources are not comparable to their animal counterparts because we find some essential amino acids in small quantities (Brown, 2017). Another argument for the "superiority" of animal protein sources is that they also have other important nutrients lacking in plant-based foods, such as vitamin B12, vitamin D, iron, and zinc.

Plant-based proteins do, however, do have their benefits. They take longer to digest, keeping us feeling full for extended periods of time, and they have fiber that keeps our digestive tracts going strong. The same argument that I used earlier regarding the high content of other nutrients in animal proteins can back up the importance of certain plant-based proteins. For example, vitamin C, inulin, pectin, and lignans (all are types of fiber) are only found in plants. Therefore, we should

consider plant proteins an important part of our diets! Foods rich in plant-based proteins include nuts, lentils, grains, legumes, rice, soy, and some fruits (avocado).

The "animal protein vs. plant protein" argument should not have a "winner." At the end of the day, proteins should be more about quality than quantity, and it's essential to consider the whole nutritional package that comes with your protein source. Proteins come with vitamins, minerals, fiber, carbohydrates, and fats. So, go for protein sources rich in nutrients and low in saturated fats and processed carbs. Increasing your meat intake is not a "fix-all" solution to getting in that daily protein. Instead, mix in lean meats and animal products with veggies, legumes, grains, and nuts, to ensure that your meals are packed with all the essentials that our bodies need to thrive and prosper!

Intermittent and Long-Term Fasting

Intermittent fasting is a fancy term attributed to different eating programs that include short periods of fasting. The purpose of intermittent and long-term fasting is to improve overall health and keep organism young. Although it's hard to pinpoint when these eating schedules gained popularity, it's not a stretch to say that Yoshinori Ohsumi, a Japanese scientist, had a big role to play in making the practice go mainstream. In 2016, Yoshinori won a Nobel prize (in Medicine and Physiology) for his study on autophagy in yeast. Autophagy roughly translates to "self-eating," and it is a process in which a cell "eats" parts of itself that are not useful anymore to use them in the renewal process. Simply put, "dead" parts of the cell are recycled to create new ones.

By studying autophagy in yeast, a simple organism, Yoshinori identified the genes that prompted it, leading to the discovery that these genes are also present in humans. In humans, autophagy is found in the cellular process of fighting off infections or the drainage of harmful substances. Autophagy is also responsible for cell renewal, keeping the body younger for longer and slowing down aging. That's where fasting comes into play. When you abstain from eating for a time, your blood sugar levels drop, triggering your body to go into

“survival mode,” protecting itself by employing autophagy to get nutrients from the inside.

An experiment on fruit flies showed that early life intermittent fasting (two days fed with a five-day fast) increased their lifespan and led to long-term beneficial effects such as improved gut health as well as reducing the prevalence of age-related diseases (Catterson et al., 2018). A study of human subjects tested different types of short term fasting, from whole day fasting to alternate-day fasting, and restricted feeding. The conclusions were that short fasts (of 18-24 hours) promoted weight loss through fat oxidation, increasing metabolic rates, and reduced total cholesterol (Tinsley & La Bounty, 2015).

Although there is no standard duration for fasting, autophagy begins about 12 hours after the last meal, so that is the time mark where proper fasting begins. But you should also know that fasting for multiple days (especially, beginning from three days onwards) can lead to serious health conditions. Fasting is also not recommended if you’re trying to conceive or are pregnant, you have any medical condition, you have a history of eating disorders, or you have a stressful event coming up (work or school-related). Always consult a health professional before committing to any restrictive feeding program and choose a form of fasting that would be beneficial for you without endangering your health.

Separate Nutrition

Separate nutrition refers to a diet in which one must follow specific food combining rules to promote digestion and nutrient absorption. The rules are focused on separating certain food categories, establishing what types of foods should always be mixed together, and guidelines regarding how to eat properly to boost digestive function. Let’s start with the food categories that should never be combined or consumed within a few hours of each other. Here we can include starches and sugars, starches and proteins, and proteins and sugars.

Starches refer to foods such as grains, legumes, beans, peas, potatoes, corn, carrots, squash, and rice. Sugars are naturally

found in fruits, but keep in mind that they are also present in most highly-processed foods for their preserving properties. According to separate nutrition rules, the combination of starches and sugars promotes fermentation, which is the leading cause of bloating and gas. The fermentation process also produces acetaldehyde, a chemical that is toxic to the liver and harms our overall well-being. Similarly, a diet rich in starch-sugar combinations is said to create a beneficial environment for fungi and bacteria, microorganisms that like to feed on these nutrients, leading to bacterial or fungal infections, such as candida, eczema, and psoriasis.

Protein-rich foods include meats (beef, chicken), dairy, eggs, fish, mushrooms, broccoli, and olives. The starches-protein combo is not as bad as the starch-sugars one, but it is not ideal either. The human body has a hard time digesting this food combination, especially if a person has a slow metabolism or other health issues that weaken the organism. To explain why starches-proteins mixtures present a challenge for the digestive function, let's look at the most common example, which is steak and potatoes. The digestive process goes something like this:

1. The potatoes, which are mainly starches, go through the first stage of digestion in the mouth, through the action of an enzyme in our saliva called amylase.

2. The starches are then broken down into two basic compounds by different enzymes: dextrose and maltose. The digestion of starches slows down when they get to the stomach because they require a more alkaline environment to be further broken down. They spend little time in the stomach, quickly moving towards the intestines where the digestion process is completed.

3. The steak, which is animal protein, starts its digestion journey into the stomach, through the action of pepsin - an enzyme that's activated by gastric acid. Proteins need to spend up to a few hours in this acidic environment to be fully processed by the human body.

4. When we have the steak-potato combo, the starches end up staying too long in an acidic environment that's not beneficial for digestion, and the proteins are rushed into the intestines before they are fully broken down. This will result in fermentation and the accumulation of undigested protein in the intestine, which the body will then have to "flush out" to protect digestive health.

Even though our digestive system is fully capable of processing starches and proteins separately, the combination messes with our natural mechanism, making it more difficult for us to digest it.

Now that we've covered the other two combos with protein and sugars combinations, things are pretty straightforward. We have the sugars that trigger fermentation and the production of gas. We have proteins that, if they reach the intestines while they are only partially digested, start to rot, leading to discomfort and some very unpleasant odors. Put one and one together, and the conclusion is quite unfortunate. One guideline of separate nutrition is to eat sweets such as fruits or anything with artificial sweeteners separately, thus avoiding combining proteins and starches.

While separate nutrition rules are mainly focused on what should not be eaten together, there is one very important guideline regarding a food group that works well with anything, except for sugars (which we already established that they should be eaten on their own). That food group is vegetables, especially leafy greens. Foods such as spinach, kale, cabbage, lettuce, arugula, and turnip leaves go well with any protein or starch, stimulating digestion and filling our bodies with the minerals and vitamins we need. This rule goes hand in hand with the basic nutrition guideline that encourages people to reserve half of their plate for veggies. Thus, even if you're not fond of the separation diet principles, there are still aspects that you can implement into your eating habits without committing to food combination rules.

Some other guidelines included in the separate nutrition "rule book" are:

- Eat slowly and chew your food thoroughly to give your body time to secrete the enzymes required for digestion and aid it to break down foods.
- Try eating fruits in the morning and wait at least three hours before having a richer meal. And since we're on fruits, it is advised to eat certain types of fruit groups together. There are three main fruit types: acidic, sub acidic, and sweet. Citrus, strawberries, plums, and pineapple are acidic; apple, peaches, apricots, grapes, and mangoes are sub-acidic, and bananas, raisins, dates, and figs are sweet. That means that, if you have an orange in the morning, you can pair it with other acidic fruits like strawberries. Or if you'd rather have an apple, combine it with a juicy peach or some mango slices. Being mindful of fruit groups can further aid the digestion process.
- Opt for whole and raw foods whenever possible because they are nutritious and rich in enzymes that stimulate digestion.
- Don't drink water during your meals. I'll speak more about water and when are the ideal moments of the day to drink it in the next chapter!

Please keep in mind that the separate nutrition rules are only guidelines, and you should treat them as such. The efficiency of this diet varies, depending on your body type, goals, and your overall state of well-being. For example, if you have a slow metabolism and want to lose weight, being mindful of food combinations might help you shed some pounds and stimulate your digestion. Separation nutrition guidelines are also beneficial for people who experience bloating, gas, or constipation because it's rich in fibers, and it reduces fermentation.

Locked Foods

To end this chapter on an interesting note, let's go through some foods and food categories that we should avoid at all costs, according to dietetics and nutrition experts.

- Fruit juices and sodas - most commercially sold fruit juices have tons of added sugars. Opt for 100% fruit juice

or make your own fruity beverage at home by slicing some fresh fruit and adding them to plain old water. Sodas (including diet sodas) are just as bad, with artificial sweeteners and added chemicals that raise glucose levels and promote obesity. Herbal teas or even coffee are much better for your overall health.

- Sugary breakfast cereals - besides having a lot of added sugars, cereals are also made from processed grains, which are not as filling or nutritious as whole grains. Choose cereals with high-fiber content such as bran flakes or oats.
- Pre-made dough, crust, sauces, creams, frostings, dressings, and garnishes - as convenient as they might be for cooking, any pre-made food item is lathered with trans fats, preservatives, refined sugars, and processed grains (for doughs and crusts). Nothing pre-made will ever be as healthy as what you can make at home with fresh, high-quality ingredients.
- Instant food - whether it be noodles, microwaveable rice, packaged popcorn, hot pockets, or other fast-food type frozen goodies, any food product that you can prepare in a jiffy is most likely not beneficial for you. Instant foods can have added sugars, overly high amounts of salt and trans fats, and other additives that are unhealthy and low fiber content. Remember always to check the labels when buying frozen foods and be wary of any food item that boasts how “quick” you can prepare it.
- White bread, white rice, and other foods made with highly processed grains - nothing that goes through a load of mechanical and chemical processes can come out unscathed. Grains, for example, lose a lot of fibers and nutrients when milled, the result being a less-filling product. What’s worse is that to increase shelf life, white flour and other similar products have many sweeteners and additives, which can lead to obesity and increase the risks of developing Type 2 diabetes. Try to always go for whole grains and whole-grain products.

- Processed foods - here we can include cheese (cheese cream, butter, margarine), meats (salami, sausages, hot-dogs, burgers), pastries, cookies, cakes, and most fast-foods (french fries, pizza, chicken nuggets, tacos, etc.). These are typically low in nutrients and high in calories, fats, salt, and sugar content, making them the worst things you can put into your body.
- Gluten-free, low-fat, and other "diet" products - be incredibly careful with these wolves in sheep's clothing. More often than not, these products replace the fat, gluten, or carbs with other unhealthy ingredients. For example, low-fat or diet ice cream has a lot of sugar or sugar substitutes to maintain the flavor. Low-carb candy bars are jam-packed with additives that will mess with your digestive system, and gluten-free products hide many sugars and refined grains behind their "healthy" facade. Always take a good, hard look at the food label before falling for one of those "healthy" alternatives.
- Coffee drinks - there are many health benefits to drinking plain coffee, which is a natural antioxidant and promotes a healthy cardiovascular system. But commercial coffee drinks have creamers, sugars, additives, and syrups, making them just as bad as soda. Taking your coffee black or making your own will allow you to enjoy the drink without unknowingly consuming unhealthy substances.
- Non-organic fruits (especially strawberries) and veggies - the reason is simple, pesticides. These substances made to protect the fruits and vegetables from infestations are very harmful to humans, causing endocrine dysfunctions. If organic produce is too expensive for your budget, try cleaning fruits and veggies with baking soda or a water and vinegar solution to get rid of the nasty chemicals (UC Berkeley School of Public Health, 2019). Keep in mind that there's no way to clean out the pesticides that are absorbed into the product, but by investing more time in cleaning your fruits and veggies, you will still get a healthier alternative.

Changing the way you eat will have an immediate and noticeable effect on your well-being and overall health, so the sooner you start making better nutrition decisions, the sooner you'll reap the benefits. Make your first steps towards longevity today by watching what and how much you eat!

Chapter 2
How Much Water Should You Drink to Improve Brain Function and Energy Levels?

Water is an integral part of our lives. Our bodies, for example, are approximately 60% water (Gunnars, 2020), and we are in a constant state of losing water through sweat and urine. The tricky part is that the cells in our bodies depend on that water to work properly. When water levels get too low (dehydration), all these cells, especially the brain cells, can't carry out their supposed functions, leading to fatigue, mood swings, and cognitive issues such as poor motor coordination reduced attention span, and slow thought-processing speed (Mills, 2020). Sure, for mild cases of dehydration, you will only experience a lingering sense of thirst, dry mouth, going to the toilet only three or four times a day, and a general sense of feeling tired (National Health Service, 2019). However, you should not forget that dehydration has a negative effect on the cognitive ability of people of all ages, but women and people over the age of 60 are specifically vulnerable to the side effects of water deprivation (Mills, 2020).

Even if you don't consider the scientific data, if you tried to go for a day or two without drinking a drop of water, you would notice just how important it is to maintain a balance in water consumption.

Although water is undeniably the basis of all life, there are many contradictory opinions when it comes to how much water we should drink in a day and when are the optimal moments to enjoy a glass of good old H_2O. There is also the question regarding other fluids, such as natural juices, teas, coffee, and what role they play in staying hydrated. In this chapter, we'll explore the potential answer to these questions

as well as the beneficial effects that water has on the human body.

How Much Water Do We Need?

Scientifically speaking, the recommended amount of water per day for women is around 8-11 cups, and 10-15 cups for men, depending on the lifestyle and health conditions of each individual (Armstrong & Johnson, 2018). Meanwhile, the popular and unofficial advice is to drink about eight small glasses (240ml) of water a day, on top of whatever other liquids you might ingest throughout the day. This theory of the eight glasses, which is widely known as the "8x8 rule," has many shortcomings. For once, it does not take into consideration that hydration requirements depend on age, gender, body weight, activity level, and the environment a person lives in. For example, an athlete sweats a lot, so they need to replenish their water levels more frequently than a sedentary person. The same goes for a person living in a hot, arid climate. Another issue is that it trains people to focus on drinking a pre-set amount of water rather than listening to the signals of our bodies.

Without a doubt, you are better off following the gender-based recommended amount than the dubious eight glasses rule, but neither is the ideal approach for *you* . Water is so important because it helps us to regulate our temperature, serves as a carrier for nutrients, takes part in biochemical reactions, and allows us to dispose of harmful substances. If as little as 1% of our total water is lost, our bodies start to experience dehydration symptoms. Maintaining the water balance is crucial for our well -being, and not knowing how much water you need daily can make it very hard to accomplish this essential task.

The good news is that, although you may not know how frequently you need to hydrate, your body does. Our brains have the capacity to detect when that water balance is disrupted, and it triggers the sensation of thirst to remediate the issue. The brain also initiates a back-up plan by signaling the kidneys to conserve fluids just to make sure that the water balance is preserved. This preservation by the kidneys can be

observed with the naked eye through a decrease in urination frequency and a yellower, more concentrated urine. So, the short and simple answer to the “how much” question is, drink when you’re thirsty. More and more experts are starting to advocate the importance of listening to the signals relayed by our bodies, and only drink water when we feel the natural urge to do it (J. Brown, 2020).

Three simple guidelines to follow regarding hydration would be:

- Drink water when you are thirsty and stop when the sensation disappears.
- Be wary of your water intake while you’re exercising or subject to high temperatures - you need to compensate for all the sweat!
- Be considerate of your health condition - if you’re experiencing episodes of diarrhea or vomiting, you need to drink more water to restore your fluid balance. The same goes for women who are breastfeeding.

Note that our natural mechanism for detecting dehydration becomes less reliable once we pass the age of 60 (J. Brown, 2020). I’m not even officially 60 yet, and I notice that I can sometimes go for a few hours without drinking water. It just slips my mind, and I beat myself up every time I realize this mistake. Please remember to stay hydrated, fellow youngsters. Try to get in that eight to fifteen cups of water per day if your thirst sense is not as sharp as it used to be.

Proper hydration

Can You Drink Too Much Water?

The straightforward answer is yes; there is such a thing as too much water. Anything good consumed excessively can and will harm you in some capacity. Drinking more water than our bodies “tells” us to can be dangerous. Excessive consumption of fluids (overhydration) can lead to the dilution of sodium in the blood as the organism tries to fix this issue, the shift in fluids triggers swellings in the lungs and brain, which can be fatal.

Athletes are more likely to overhydrate because they sweat a lot, and they overcompensate with the amount of water they drink. Something as simple as drinking one too many water glasses can quickly lead to a life-threatening situation. If you’re partaking in intense physical activity, try not to consume more water than your body is signaling you too, and, as a preventive measure, add electrolyte tablets to your fluids. These electrolytes will ensure that your blood sodium levels

won’t drop even if you happen to go a bit heavy-handed on the water intake.

Best Time to Drink Water

Drinking water when you are thirsty goes without saying, but let’s take a look at the key moments when your body might benefit from some hydration:

- Right as you get out of bed - there are many reasons why you should drink water first thing in the morning. First of all, it rehydrates the body after six to eight hours of no fluid intake. Secondly, it stimulates brain activity, making us alert, energized, and ready to take on the challenges of a new day. Last but not least, a bit of water in the morning kick starts your metabolism, preparing the body to process a nutritious breakfast (Business Insider, 2016).
- Thirty minutes before a meal - drinking water before you’re going to have a meal can stimulate digestion and reduce your appetite, which can come in handy for people who are trying to lose some weight. But try to not drink water immediately before, during, or after a meal, as it leads to a dilution of the gastric juices, hindering the digestion process (Sengupta, 2019). Hydrating right before or during meals fastens digestion, which means that your body doesn’t have the time to absorb all the nutrients from your food. Drinking water after a meal can cause bloating, and it will make you feel hungry faster than you should. Maintain a good 30-minute window before and after a meal to make sure that you’re not accidentally making it difficult for your body to digest food (Sengupta, 2019).
- Before taking a bath - a glass of water before you’re jumping into a hot bath can lower your blood pressure, which is beneficial for your health. The process is quite simple to explain. The water you ingest warms up your body from the inside out, causing your blood vessels to expand and your sodium levels to drop. When the blood vessels dilate, the pressure of the blood going through them is lowered. At the same time, high sodium levels

translate to high blood pressure, so the drop in this mineral will lower circulatory pressure. Thus, the effects of fluid intake combined with the warmth of your bath or shower certainly help to lower your blood pressure.

- Before you go to sleep - this is to prepare your body for a period in which you won't get any fluids, and it will ensure that you stay as hydrated as possible while you're enjoying a good night's rest.

Can Other Fluids or Foods Keep You Hydrated?

Sure, they can! Water is not the only one that counts; herbal teas, coffee, natural juices, milk, and water-rich foods help you stay hydrated and maintain your fluid balance. The myth that coffee and caffeinated teas are not suitable for hydration because caffeine has diuretic properties (prompting frequent urination) is just that, a myth. The effect is quite weak, and it does not undermine the hydrating properties of these beverages (Grandjean et al., 2000).

However, you shouldn't trade water for coffee in the grand scheme of things. Excessive caffeine consumption is linked to anxiety, heart palpitations, headaches, gastrointestinal issues, and high blood pressure. To avoid experiencing such side effects, don't drink more than 2.5 cups of coffee or caffeinated drinks per day (Lehman, 2020). There's no recommended intake for herbal teas, as long as you're not adding sweeteners to these otherwise healthy beverages.

Some nutritious, water-rich foods that can help you stay hydrated throughout the day include watermelon, peaches, strawberries, oranges, grapefruit, celery, tomatoes, bell peppers, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, cucumber, skim milk, plain yogurt, cottage cheese, and soups (or broths).

The Beneficial Effects of Water

Since this chapter was all about water, I thought it would be nice to end on a high note with some information on the numerous positive effects of this essential fluid.

First of all, proper hydration promotes weight loss. That is because it temporarily boosts metabolism immediately after

intake, and it reduces appetite, allowing you to feel satiated despite eating fewer calories (Gunnars, 2020). Additionally, drinking your water cold or at least at room temperature helps you burn a few more calories, simply because your body has to heat it up to its own temperature. That being said, without a healthy diet and consistent exercise routine, water consumption alone won't get you too far in your weight loss journey. Secondly, water has positive effects on brain function and energy levels. We observe this with the side effects of dehydration (fatigue, lack of concentration, mood shifts) and the big difference that a glass of water in the morning makes.

Other beneficial effects linked with adequate hydration include:

- A more efficient digestion process with better nutrient absorption and lower risks of constipation.
- A decreased risk of developing kidney stones, urinary tract infections, and high blood pressure.
- Enhanced performance during intense physical exercises.
- Good lubrication of the joints and tissues, leading to less discomfort and pain when partaking in physical activities.
- An improved skin complexion (although these reports are only anecdotal, and they haven't been proven yet through scientific means).

Chapter 3
Detox and How It Can Boost Your Immune System and Increase Vitality

It's quite rare nowadays to search for nutrition guidelines and not stumble upon at least one or two detox or cleansing programs. Detoxification refers to the removal of toxins or impurities from the body to promote health. Our bodies already have a particularly good cleansing system in place, with toxins being eliminated mainly by the liver but also through the kidneys (urine), skin (sweat), intestines, lymphatic system, and lungs.

Detox comes to aid people with compromised cleansing systems that are not able to filter out the impurities in the usual way, similar to a clogged plumbing system. In situations such as this, detox gets rid of the blockage, allowing the fluids in your body to move freely, just like water through a clean pipe. These toxins that wreak havoc in our bodies come from many places, including the foods that we ingest, and chemical contaminants and pollutants present in our environments. Detox programs help the body by stimulating the liver function, promoting kidney and digestive health, improving blood circulation, rejuvenating organs (through fasting), and providing essential nutrients. If your natural cleansing system works just fine, then detox may not be the best option for you.

Cleansing diets seek to eliminate toxins through a wide variety of approaches, from fasting to taking dietary supplements, switching to a liquid diet, using laxatives or enemas, drinking lots of water, or having a very restricted diet. Different approaches focus on different goals. Usually, a typical detox program focuses on boosting liver and kidney function, replacing solid "unhealthy" foods with liquids (soups, smoothies, and juices with added supplements), or "unclogging" the colon through the other end (enemas, laxatives, or colon hydrotherapy). If you choose an approach that is good for your particular needs, and you apply the

principles correctly, detox is very beneficial for you, thanks to its immunity and vitality-boosting effects.

However, before we jump into the technicalities of deciding if you need to follow a detox program and choosing a cleansing diet that would work for you, we need to take a look at what the research says about detoxification and the health risks associated with it. It's important to be informed and to know exactly what you're getting yourself into.

Detox: Science and Risks

Many nutritionists and dietitians don't support the idea that our bodies need help to eliminate harmful substances. Experts believe that the liver and the kidneys are the only detox "machines" that we need, and, as long as a person eats healthy, drinks plenty of water, and exercises regularly, there is no need for external aids.

It sure doesn't help that there have been only a handful of studies on the effectiveness of detox in people. Although the research showed positive results regarding weight loss and blood pressure, the integrity of the studies is, at best, dubious. There have been no randomized controlled trials, which tend to provide the most accurate and trustworthy information to researchers, and the studies themselves have been poorly conducted. (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, 2019).

Additionally, the claims that cleansing programs aid weight loss are only partially true. Yes, in the short term, the sudden change in alimentation and the restrictive diet does lead to weight loss and a bit more energy (because you give up on a lot of unhealthy foods). However, detox takes a toll on the body, and the weight usually comes right back once the person resumes their regular eating habits (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, 2019).

Regarding the safety of cleaning programs, there is much to consider. Some safety aspects that you should be conscious of before committing to detox include:

- Some cleansing products on the market employ the use of fake advertising and contain illegal and potentially

dangerous ingredients. Be very careful with the detox products and paraphernalia you buy and triple- check every ingredient list. The good idea is to ask a dietician, nutritionist, or doctor to review the product before buying or consuming it.

- Unpasteurized detox juices potentially contain harmful bacteria, which are especially dangerous for children, older adults, and individuals that have a weakened immune system.
- Some juices have an abnormally high concentration of oxalate, a substance that's naturally found in beets and spinach. Although safe in small quantities, it affects kidney function if consumed in high quantities.
- Overly restrictive diets put you at risk of developing deficits, as they don't always provide all the essential nutrients your body needs.
- The use of laxatives can lead to severe diarrhea and electrolyte imbalances.
- Going on a "liquids only" diet leads to overhydration.
- Colon cleansing procedures have serious side-effects and are not recommended for people that have heart diseases, kidney diseases, gastrointestinal issues, or hemorrhoids.
- If you have diabetes, you absolutely must consult your health care provider before changing your diet in any way.

Do You Need to Detoxify?

Generally speaking, if you don't have a chronic disease (such as diabetes), tuberculosis, or cancer, and if you're not underage or nursing, then detoxing can be a safe option for you. Although, again, don't commit to a cleansing program without consulting your healthcare provider first. For an individual with bad eating habits who is otherwise in relatively good health, it is advised to undergo at least one detox session per year (Smith, 2017). The reasoning for this recommendation being that nowadays, we get in contact with a lot of toxins, be it from the food we eat or our environment.

A cleaning program might be beneficial for you if you're experiencing symptoms such as fatigue, bloating, slow metabolism, frequent allergic reactions, and low-grade infections, menstrual issues, or mental tiredness.

Keep in mind that healthy detox starts with a preparation stage in which you start to minimize your toxin intake. It's a process that takes time. Some common actions to take before starting a cleansing diet include:

- Eliminating refined sugars, saturated fats, coffee, and alcohol from your diet, because they are unhealthy and have a toxic effect on the body. The same goes for smoking - it's highly recommended that you abstain from it, at least while you're detoxifying, to make the most out of your cleanse.
- Minimize the use of chemical-based personal care items and household cleaners - substitute them with 100% natural alternatives or try to find healthier, commercially available options.
- Manage your stress - while it has its perks, stress is generally not a promoter of good health. Yoga and meditation are good stress management methods that help you get off on the right foot on your cleansing journey, from a physical and mental point of view.

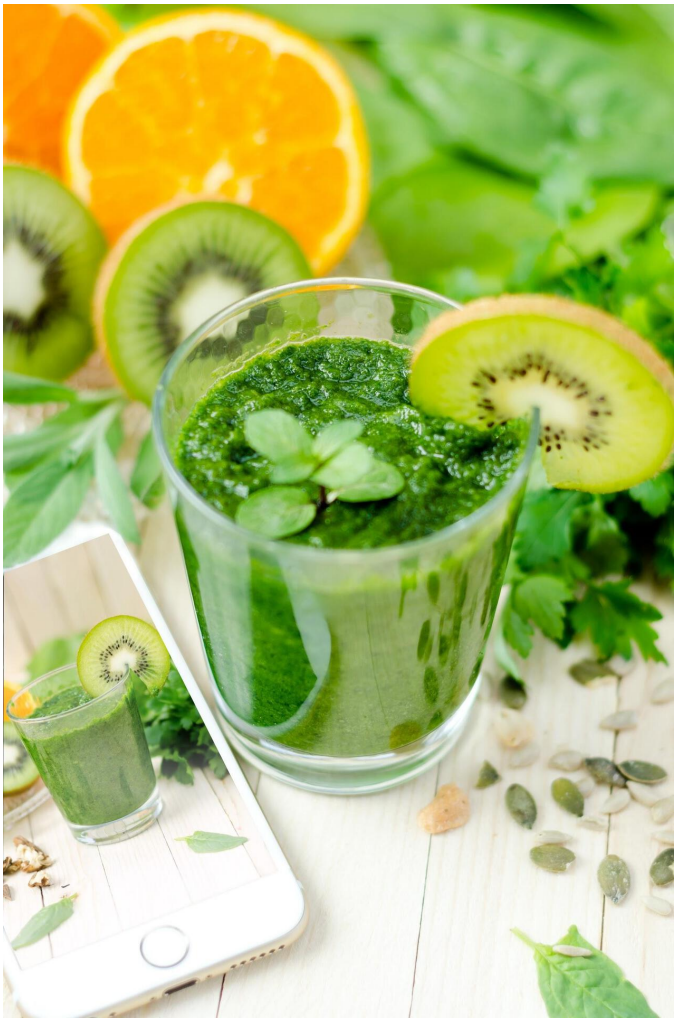
Choosing a Detox Program

There are many kinds of cleansing diets, varying from mild modifications of your actual eating habits to extreme restrictions and prolonged fasts. Additionally, some detoxes are meant to be carried out for short periods, while others seek to serve as a long-term program to take care of your body. Most cleaning diets include at least one of the following steps:

- Cutting down on or eliminating toxin intake from alcohol, coffee, refined sugars, and cigarettes.
- Practicing prolonged (1-3 days) or intermittent fasting.
- Avoiding foods that have allergens and then slowly reintegrating them in your diet.

- Drinking a lot of fluids, especially in the form of vegetable and fruit juices, smoothies, and teas, but water consumption is also promoted.
- Eating clean (by eliminating foods that are high in chemicals, metals, or other potentially harmful substances).
- Taking food supplements.
- Adding herbs into your meals.
- Using laxatives or other colon cleansers.
- Staying active and exercising regularly.

Perhaps the most popular detox programs that you'll find on the market are juice or liquid cleanses. These diets usually involve the consumption of fruits and veggies juices for one to three days at a time. There is a lot of variation when it comes to the juices themselves. Some programs require homemade juices while others promote the consumption of store-bought cleansing juices (which may or may not be very bad for you). On top of juices, some programs allow for the consumption of protein smoothies or vegan snacks to satiate hunger and provide some much-needed minerals, vitamins, and other essential nutrients. However, the focus still remains on the liquid diet, so expect to have a restriction rule of one smoothie/snack per day. Another variation of the liquid diet is based on the consumption of salted water or lemon water, with added herbs or supplements. This stricter variation is not for everybody, and I personally don't embrace it.



Juice cleanse

To undergo a juice cleanse, you need to go through three stages:

1. Preparation - gradually eliminate unhealthy foods such as processed foods, refined sugar, and animal products, and toxins (nicotine, caffeine, refined sugars) for about five days before starting the detox. At this stage, aim to increase fruits and veggies intake and be mindful about staying hydrated.
2. Detox - drink a minimum of 32 ounces of raw, organic fruit and green vegetable juice per day for one to three days. These juices usually contain kale, spinach, carrot, leafy greens, beets, cabbage, and celery. Fruits that juice well include apples, apricots, mangoes, pineapples, kiwis, cherries, and peaches.

Be sure to remove any pits or seeds before juicing the fruits.

3. Post-detox - slowly introduce foods back into your daily meals, being careful with your food portions. It's best to eat lightly, to help your body re-adjust to solid food.

Keep in mind that although the cleanse will benefit you in the long run, you won't feel that great during the detox stage. Expect to experience some negative emotions such as frustration and anger, as the hunger sensation gets harder to bear. Additionally, be careful with the amount of physical activity you undertake. If you're a very active person, it would be a good idea to reduce your physical efforts and opt for light exercise while you're undergoing a cleanse not to overexert your body.

If you want to follow a gentler juice cleanse, include in your meal plans some vegan foods (raw carrots or bell peppers and gluten-free meals), almond milk, salads (with herbs), smoothies (with bananas or avocados), and vegetable broths.

A short-term juice cleanse improves digestion, boosts immunity, and energy, and helps your body flush toxins (Wong, 2020). However, stricter juice cleanses are very low in calories and don't meet the nutritional needs of the average person. Diets that go on for more than three days lead to malnutrition, glucose level spikes (due to the natural sugars from the concentrated juices), kidney problems, and liver damage (Waldbieser, 2018), (Wong, 2020). To prevent health issues, choose a gentle juice cleanse, and stick to the three-day detox program.

Liver and kidney cleanses are detox programs that seek to support the body's natural cleansing mechanism. They focus on the consumption of foods that boost kidney and liver function, helping you to recover after a hard weekend or simply stimulating your metabolism. Although a traditional cleanse needs to be taken over a short span of three to five days with dietary restrictions, in this case, you could actually make a habit out of consuming liver and kidney "boosters." A

plant-based diet, for example, is said to stimulate our natural cleansing mechanism (Waldbieser, 2018). Great detoxifying foods that improve liver and kidney function include whole grains, fish, avocados, bananas, spinach, leafy greens, broccoli, garlic, radishes, leeks, parsley, walnuts, sesame seeds, green teas, lemon, and apple cider vinegar. Additionally, turmeric is a natural detoxifying spice that promotes liver health, and the consumption of olive oil and healthy fats can decrease the risk of having a fatty liver.

If juice and liver cleanses have the potential to improve health and promote well-being, the same can hardly be said about colon cleansings. While they may help people that suffer from constipation or irritable bowel syndrome, colon detoxes come with many health risks that make them quite detrimental (Waldbieser, 2018). That is because colon cleansings usually require the use of laxatives, enemas, or other colon flushers, which can permanently harm your digestive tract, eliminate healthy bacteria needed for digestion, cause dehydration, and lead to electrolyte imbalances (Schaefer, 2018).

If you think that a colon cleansing detox might be beneficial for you, talk to your doctor about the potential complications and choose your therapist carefully. Pick colon hygienists that work for professional organizations and check what former patients had to say about the therapist, and especially their disinfection routine before you commit to an appointment. Keep in mind that your therapist should use sterilized tools and disposable equipment (where possible) and be wear appropriate protective gear. Don’t attempt to carry out enemas at home, as you might perforate your bowel.

Finally, there are simple cleansing programs, such as sugar detoxes and hypoallergenic detoxes, that focus on eliminating one or multiple potentially harmful elements of your diet. These are the most recommended types of detox diets because they don’t put you at risk of developing deficits, and they don’t require the use of dubious methods. Such detoxes promote a healthy lifestyle, and they give you a vitality and immunity boost. To undergo such a detox, you need to gradually cut down your sugar, allergens, processed foods, or other toxins until you can eliminate them completely. Keep the

restriction in place for a few days or a few weeks, depending on the results you want and your health provider's advice, then slowly reintroduce them back into your diet.

For beginners, embark on a short, seven day, simple, detox diet, focused on restricting the consumption of refined grains, processed foods, full-fat dairy, foods with added sugars, fatty meats, caffeine, and alcohol. For this one week detox, experiment with healthy foods, such as fruits and veggies, whole grains, low-fat dairy, nuts, and plant-based oils. Do your best at staying hydrated and as physically active as possible. Essentially, this detox plan follows the nutrition rules I wrote about in the first chapter of this book, with the added element of avoiding harmful chemicals. Here are some tips to help you get the most out a simple detox plan:

- Include a lot of antioxidant-rich foods such as blueberries, red kidney beans, cranberries, pecans, black plums, strawberries, raspberries, apples, and artichoke hearts in your daily meals or snacks.
- Focus on eating cleansing foods, which support our natural cleansing system by providing essential nutrients, like minerals and fatty acids. Some good examples are arugula, lemons, garlic, pomegranate, cabbage, apples, avocados, almonds, parsley, ginger, blueberries, green tea, beets, and fennel.
- Introduce high-fiber foods such as whole grains (whole wheat, whole oats, quinoa, brown rice), seeds (flaxseeds, hemp seeds, sesame seeds, chia seeds), and nuts (almonds, pecans, cashew, walnuts) into eating plan to promote digestion.
- Try to opt for seasonal fruits and veggies that are locally grown to ensure freshness and quality.
- Balance out your meals, so they include a wide variety of nutrients - an ideal meal should have some fruits and veggies, protein (plant-based or animal-based), healthy fats, and wholegrains.
- Remember to stay hydrated by drinking an appropriate amount of water and herbal teas.

- Include light exercises such as walking, jogging, cycling, or yoga in your daily routine.
- Invest some time in learning how to manage your stress and negative emotions, to ensure that both your body and mind are being cleansed of impurities and toxins.

Chapter 4
Exercise that Can Revitalize Your Body

Aside from having a healthy diet, being physically active is the best thing that you can do for your body. Exercise keeps your muscles toned, protects your mind from the deteriorating effects of time, and improves mood.

To get a better idea of the importance of the physical activity of any kind, think of a new car that's been sitting around in a garage for 20 years. From a technical point of view, the car is in mint condition, like an in-box collectible. However, if you try to drive that car, you'll notice that its rubber bands are dry, the metal has gone rusty in some spots, and the liquid has evaporated. If that's what years of standing still can do to a car, imagine what it does to your body. The joints get stiffer and stiffer with each day of a sedentary lifestyle. The muscles that go unused dwindle, your heart gets weaker, and even your cognitive ability suffers from the lack of movement. It's normal to become less active with age. However, we understand that by allowing our bodies to "sit in the garage," we're not protecting them from disease and old age but actively allowing them to deteriorate.

Scientific Proof on the Importance of Exercise

If you're still not quite convinced of the beneficial effects that exercise, even in small or moderate quantities, has on your body, then let's look at some studies. First, a small study compared elderly (55 to 79 years old) amateur cyclists to sedentary people of the same age. The initial, unsurprising finds were that the cyclists had more muscle mass as well as lower cholesterol and body fat levels. But the researchers also noticed that the cyclists had a better, younger-looking immune system, allowing them to not only feel better but to be biologically healthier than sedentary people of their same age (Pollock et al., 2018). Keep in mind that these were amateur cyclists, not hardcore athletes, so we're not talking about people that spent years of their lives in the gym.

Another study focused on analyzing the health of active people over the age of 40, who engaged in moderate exercises, found that their skin composition was more comparable to that of 30-year-olds, rather than sedentary individuals of their own age (Reynolds, 2014). Second, several studies that looked at the link between cognitive ability and being physically active had interesting conclusions. One of them found that fit middle-aged women were 88% less likely to develop dementia (a degenerative disease) than women of the same age who were only partially active (Hörder et al., 2018). The other study looked at older adults, between the ages of 60 to 88, who were instructed to take a 30-minutes walk four times per week for 12 weeks. This slight change in daily routine led to a strengthening of neural connections in brain areas associated with memory loss (Chirles et al., 2017). A third study that focused yet again on older women found that aerobic exercises have a positive effect on memory and learning, stimulating the growth of the hippocampus area of the brain (ten Brinke et al., 2014).

And last, but definitely not least, a study looked at the effects of cardio and high-intensity exercise on the cardiac muscles of people over the age of 50. With age, the heart muscles get stiff, which makes it harder for the body to get its necessary supply of oxygenated blood. The study found that the test subjects showed a significant improvement in heart performance in only two years of constantly engaging in high-intensity physical activities (Howden et al., 2018). This led researchers to theorize that exercise can prevent or even, to some extent, improve heart muscle stiffness, regardless of the age of the participants.

In the long run, exercise keeps us sharp as a tack, both physically and mentally. Science has proven, time and time again, that movement of any kind promotes health and longevity and that there is no age limit to becoming active (Ahmed, 2019). The best part is that you need not go to a gym or invest money in expensive equipment to get in some physical activity each day. Simple activities such as walking or easy exercises you can do in the comfort of your own home are enough to revitalize your body, as long as you make it a

habit. Keep in mind that being consistent is often more important than the exercise you choose.

With all the technicalities out of the way, let's finally go through some exercise that can help you relieve joint stiffness, improve mobility and flexibility, keep your circulatory system healthy, and make you feel young and spry!

An important note here is to consult your health care provider before you start any exercise program, especially if you suffer from chronic diseases. Safety should always be your number one priority.

Exercises to Improve Joint Mobility and Relieve Pain

Flexibility exercises serve the purpose of alleviating joint stiffness, allowing us to move and be active without experiencing pain or discomfort. These sorts of exercises are great for morning routines because they help our body fluids disperse through the body after a period of inactivity or for pre-workout warm-ups because they improve the range of motion of joints and muscles. For example, just 10 minutes of joint flexibility exercises can improve your cardio and strength training performance, helping you to make the most out of your physical activity (Freutel, 2020).

Taking it from head to toe, here are some flexibility exercises that don't require special equipment and that you can do at home:

Neck half circles

Improving neck mobility can relieve neck, head, and upper back pain. For this exercise, you can either stand or sit, as long as you're in a comfortable position. To begin, tilt your head to the right until you feel your muscles stretch. Then, bobble your head forward until your chin meets your chest. You might feel some pain or discomfort while moving your neck, so don't push yourself too hard. Continue the rolling motion towards the left side and stop when you feel your muscles stretch again on that opposite side. That is a half-circle. To complete the exercise session, aim for another three half circles, alternating sides.

A good tip for this exercise is to take your time and focus on moving as smoothly as possible.

Shoulder rolls

Working on shoulder mobility can improve your posture and your form, which can relieve the tightness you feel through the front of your shoulders and your chest. This exercise is simple. You start in a standing position, with your arms stretched and laying at the sides of your body. Then carefully roll your shoulders forward, making slow and deliberate movements. After that, roll them back, focusing on really getting rid of that stiffness. Do around 10 rolls in each direction.

Trunk rotations

This exercise is great for both posture and mobility, and it improves mobility in the lower back region. To do this exercise, you may need a yoga mat or clean towel because you need to lie down on a straight surface; you might get away with doing trunk rotations in bed if you have a firm mattress. Begin in a lying position, with your arms outstretched (your upper body should form a "T") and your knees raised and bent at a 90 degrees angle. Your knees should touch each other. Start the exercise by turning your legs to the right side, towards the ground. Keep your legs together and move them as one. Hold the position for about 10 seconds, and then slowly return your legs to the starting position. Repeat the same movement for the left side. Continue to alternate sides until you complete 10 rotations.

As with other exercises on this list, your focus should be to execute the exercise properly and engage your muscles. Take it at your own pace and move as slowly as you need to.

Hip openers - swings and rolls

Hip openers are exercises that seek to "open up" your hips to a wider set of motions. Your hip joint is one of the most mobile joints in your body, having the ability to move in all directions, and it contributes a lot to your overall stability and balance. So, it's important to keep your hips flexible.

To do hip swings, you'll need a sturdy chair. Position yourself

behind and slightly to the right of the chair - keeping a hand on it for support. Stand straight with your knees slightly bent. Begin the exercise by slowly swinging your right leg forward and back, keeping your back straight. Carry out around 10 back-and-forth motions, then move to the left side of the chair and repeat the exercise with your left leg.

To do hip rolls, you must lay down on a flat surface. Spread your legs apart and keep your knees straight. Next, roll your knees and feet towards each other, so they face themselves. Remember to move slowly and focus on executing the exercise correctly. Repeat the movement for around 10 times to rejuvenate your hip joints.

Tip-Toe rises

Ankle mobility is important for balance and stability, which comes in very handy for everyday life chores such as walking up a set of stairs. To do this exercise, you need to stand next to a wall, keeping your back and body straight and a hand on the wall for support. Slowly rock forward, from your heels to your toes, until you're in tip-toe position. Then rock back onto your heels, going as far as lifting your toes off the ground. Repeat this rocking motion10 times to prepare your ankles for physical activity.

Exercises to Normalize Blood Pressure

Blood pressure varies a lot with body weight, so the best way to bring it down and normalize it is by losing weight and living a healthy lifestyle. Since we've already covered nutrition and detox, let's focus on the different physical activities that promote circulatory health:

- Biking or stationary cycling - 30 minutes a day of continuous moderate exercise is great for lowering blood pressure because it stimulates blood flow. You don't need to jump immediately into intense biking or force yourself to hit the 30-minute mark. Take it gradually and don't forget to enjoy yourself. With biking, you can enjoy some fresh air and sunlight while also getting in your daily exercise, and stationary cycling allows you to keep up with your favorite TV shows and movies. Try to have at

least three biking or cycling sessions per week.

- Hiking - this physical activity requires muscle power, balance, and stability. Because of that, it lowers blood pressure significantly while also helping you get in shape. You can start off by climbing inclined roads and slowly make your way towards hills and mountains. Two 10-minutes small hikes per day should be enough to get you going.
- Swimming - this exercise is great, especially for people that suffer from joint issues and adults over the age of 60. Moderate 150 minutes per week of swimming or vigorous 75 minutes per week, aquatic exercises promote healthy blood pressure levels and improve joint mobility. Don't forget to work your way up to 30-45 minutes sessions and be consistent.
- Resistance band exercise - this refers to any exercise done with a resistance band, such as squats, deadlifts, lunges, crunches, planks, and bends. The simple addition of a resistance band will make the exercises more engaging and difficult, forcing you to put a lot more effort into it. Just make sure you don't go overboard.

The Benefits of Walking

Although people regard walking as more of a recreational activity than a physical exercise, there's no denying that this form of cardio is great for your health. Walking checks off all the boxes for beneficial effects:

- Increases heart rate, which is great for your overall cardiac and cardiovascular health
- Puts your muscles to work and improves your fitness level if you opt for brisk walks or intermittent jogging
- Burns fat, helping you maintain a healthy weight if combined with a balanced diet
- Improves flexibility in the joints and muscles, even if you walk at an easy pace that doesn't put too much stress on your joints

If you want to reap the benefits of walking, experts recommend 30-minute brisk walks for five days a week (Harvard Health Publishing, 2018). The best way to go about walking as a workout routine is to start at an easy pace for the first five minutes to warm up, then increase your speed as much as you can for the next 20 minutes and end the walk at a slow pace to cool down. For aerobic and weight control purposes, longer walks from 45 to 60 minutes are recommended, with the same format of starting off slow and then going strong to engage your muscles. If you can't sustain a brisk pace for longer periods, try breaking a normal 30-minute walk into three, 10-minute speed walks (also known as "power walks") to achieve the same goal. If your primary goal is losing weight, try walking on inclined roads or alternating walking with jogging (five minute walks with a 10 minute light jog and repeated until the 30-60 minute mark).

Aim for 10,000 steps per day, the recommended level of activity for adults. You can keep track of your steps using a mobile fitness tracker app or a Fitbit. The secret here would be to make your way to that 10,000 steps goal by starting off with a reasonable 2,000 steps per day in your first week, then slowly adding 1,000 to your weekly tab as you increase your activity.

Some good tips to help you stay on track would be:

- Wear lightweight, comfortable shoes, and comfy socks to ensure that your feet won't suffer during your workout.
- Stick to a workout schedule, and when there's bad weather outside, get your daily steps in an indoor area, such as a mall or on a treadmill.
- Make a playlist of motivational, energizing songs to keep you in the mood while walking.
- Find a walking buddy to share the journey with, so you can support each other through this journey.

Yoga Exercises to Revitalize Your Body

Yoga is great for the body because it combines both physical and mental exercise. Yoga exercises are beginner-friendly and

accessible to anyone, regardless of gender, age, or body weight. The combination of breath control, body poses, and meditation can calm the mind and strengthen your body, making yoga great for quick morning workouts to prepare you for the day to come and for evening physical activities to help you unwind and relax.

Most yoga postures are forms of stretching that have a mindfulness element added to them, focusing on self-discovery and self-improvement. There are a wide variety of poses available for curious amateurs, and perhaps the best way to get the most out of your yoga session would be to join a class or follow along with a YouTube yoga tutorial. But let's dive into some beginner-level yoga poses to get you hooked on this fun and relaxing activity:

The Cobra Pose

This pose increases spinal flexibility, strengthens your back muscles, and relaxes your abdomen, chest, and shoulders. To do it, lay on your stomach, with your body straight and your feet extended, with the toes facing upwards. Then place your hands on the ground, right under the shoulders, and bend your elbows at a 90-degree angle. Your elbows should "hug" your sides. Anchor your pelvic region to the floor, take a deep breath and lift your chest up, making sure that your lower ribs are still touching the floor. Your shoulders should be rolled back, and your elbows should maintain their original position. You can keep your neck in a neutral position or slightly flex it backward, almost as if to rest between your shoulder blades.

Cobra Pose

The Tree Pose

This pose is great for balance, stability, and core muscles. It engages the muscles in your legs and spine. It is a basic, standing balance yoga pose, and all you need to do is keep standing on one leg while you press your other foot into your thigh. To accomplish that, start in a sitting position, with both feet anchored in the ground. Shift your weight onto the right foot while you lift the left one off the ground. Try not to lock your right knee here! Press your left foot into your right, and vice versa, to keep your hips balanced. Take a few breaths (five to 10) and then do the same for the other side. To keep your balance while in the tree pose, it helps to fix your gaze on an immovable object.

Tree Pose

The Happy Baby Pose

This is a mobility pose that targets the hips, the inner thigh, and the hamstring muscles. It's great for relieving stress and calming the mind. To do it, you need to lie on your back in such a way that it feels natural for you. Then slowly bring your knees to your chest without moving your hips. Bend your knees at a 90-degree angle and flex your feet, so they face the ceiling. Next, you need to grasp the feet around the arch with your hand and hold on to them, drawing your knees into your chest. You should feel a slight stretch in your hamstrings if you're doing it right. Take a few deep breaths and then let go of your feet and allow your back to relax naturally into the floor.

Happy Baby variation

The Downward Facing Dog

This yoga pose strengthens the arms, legs, and back while also engaging the abs and stimulating the blood flow to your brain. For this pose, your body will look kind of like a backward "V." Start by lying down on your belly, then lift yourself up on your hand and knees. Push back through your arms and lift your lower body. Your legs should be straight, and your palms should open and rooted to the floor. Rotate your upper arms and hold them straight and broaden the collarbones. Your shoulder blades should move towards your hips, and your head should hang somewhat freely. To get the burden off your arms, engage your quadriceps - this will make the pose feel a lot more relaxing. The distance between your hands and feet should be as equal as possible for stability purposes. Exhale deeply and bend your knees to break the form and come back to your starting position.

Downward Facing Dog

Since yoga is such a vast medium, I encourage you to seek out more information and find poses that would work best for you and your health goals. Also, I highly recommend you search video tutorials on the poses presented in this subchapter, because as simple as they may seem, they can be pretty difficult to pull off, and accuracy is crucial in yoga. My first downward facing dog looked more like some arthritic camel! Visual cues make a big difference; that I can assure you.

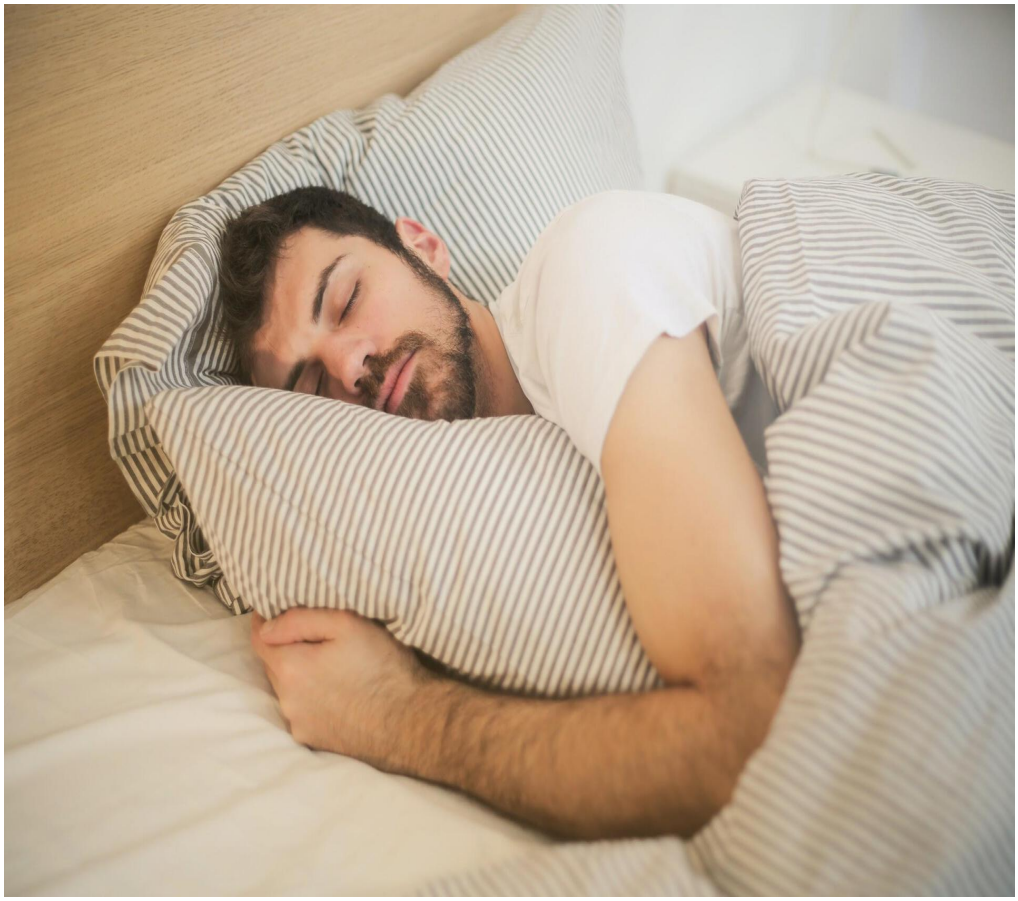
Good luck with your workouts!

Chapter 5
The Secrets of Healthy Sleep

In today's stressful world, where it seems like we don't have enough hours in a day to do all the things we want to, sleep has fallen out of grace. It's somehow reached the status of a luxury or indulgence rather than a necessity. What exactly does make sleep a necessity, besides the obvious resting reasons, and what can happen to our bodies if we don't get enough sleep?

According to research, sleep does a lot more than rest our eyes. It promotes muscle repair, allows the body to maintain critical functions, restores energy levels, and gives our brains the time and resources to process new information, benefiting the processes of learning and memorizing (Holland, 2019). When a person doesn't get their recommended hours of sleep per night (sleep deprivation), they can experience a wide range of symptoms, both physical and mental. For example, in the absence of quality rest, you'll experience an impaired ability to think clearly, delayed reactions, problems with focusing on tasks, and problems with controlling emotions. If sleep deprivation goes on for a long period, your immune system will weaken, making you vulnerable in the face of infections. You will be at a higher risk of developing health conditions such as depression, obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease (Holland, 2019). All that because you missed some zzzs along the way.

Now that we established the importance of sleep, let's see how much sleep we need to feel fresh throughout the day, how to determine the quality of our sleep, and some healthy sleep tips and tricks to stop from feeling sluggish all the time.



Healthy Sleep

How Much Sleep Do We Need?

Sleeping habits and needs change with time. An adult, for example, should receive between seven and nine hours of rest per night, but even this estimate is not suitable for every individual. Sleep needs vary a lot from one person to another. You might feel best if you get around seven hours of consecutive sleep, but some people feel more rested if they get five hours at night with some naps mixed in during the day. Similarly, there are people deeply affected by one night of insufficient sleep, while others thrive on a hectic sleeping schedule.

There are certain factors that can influence the amount of sleep you might need. First, there is age. According to the National Sleep Foundation, kids below the age of two need between 11 to 17 hours per night; preschoolers need around 10 to 13 hours per night; school-age children require nine to 11 hours per night; teenagers need eight to 10 hours per night; adults need to get that seven to nine hours per night, and senior over the

age of 65 require seven to eight hours per night (Hirshkowitz et al., 2015). These recommendations also vary depending on certain factors.

Second, we need to consider our individual genetic makeup. Yes, your genes have a say in the amount of sleep you need to feel rested and how well you can tolerate sleep deprivation. For example, a specific mutation leads to some people needing only five hours of sleep per night, even though for an average adult, that would trigger sleep deprivation symptoms (Shi et al., 2017). Similarly, people who have other genetic mutations or disorders can experience a deeper sleep or be more negatively affected by the lack of sleep (Shi et al., 2017). The bad parts about your genetic makeup having a say in your sleep requirements are that you can't change anything about it, and you can't know for sure what mutations you're carrying. Therefore, you need to monitor the amount of sleep you get and decide for yourself if it's enough or not.

The last important factor that affects sleep requirements is the quality of the rest we get. Poor quality sleep will leave you feeling tired, even if you do regularly clock in those eight hours per night. Thus, sleeping well is just as important as sleeping long enough.

Am I Getting Quality Sleep?

To see whether your present sleep behaviors and routines provide good quality rest, the Sleep Foundation created a short sequence of sentences that describe healthy sleep. Following along with their list, if you're having healthy, quality sleep, you should:

- Wake up energized, as if you've "recharged your batteries."
- Feel alert, rested, have no difficulties concentrating on your tasks and being productive through your waking hours
- Get a regular seven to nine hours of sleep in a 24-hours period, including naps
- Fall asleep quickly, within 15 to 20 minutes of getting in

bed

- Have a continuous sleep that is not interrupted by periods of lying awake, incapable of drifting back to sleep
- Not experience changes or disturbances in your sleep, such as restlessness, snoring, pauses in breathing, sleep-talking or sleepwalking, nightmares, or other abnormalities

If you don't identify with any of these statements, then it is possible that you lack sleep quality. If your sleeping routine and behaviors don't change, you are at risk of experiencing sleep deprivation. However, don't fret! There are ways in which you can improve the quality of your sleep and ensure that you'll wake up feeling refreshed and ready to take on a new day.

Let's see some tips and recommendations to get some healthy sleep.

How to Improve Your Sleep

There are many changes you can make to improve the quality and duration of your sleep. The first and foremost step towards achieving healthy sleep is to establish and adhere to a sleeping schedule. Having a routine will help you fall asleep easier and wake up feeling energized. To create a sleeping schedule that will put you on the right track, try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Having a fixed hour for bedtime and waking up will allow your body to get accustomed to a routine, improving the quality of your sleep.

To determine how much sleep, you need to try out the next simple trick:

- Pick a wake-up time based on your daily schedule and stick with it through thick and thin, even on the days when the temptation of sleeping in is hard to resist.
- To set a proper bedtime hour, consider your waking hour and do the math to allow you to clock in that recommended eight hours, and add around half an hour to it. This extra half an hour is plenty of time for you to fall asleep, even if you're having difficulties with it.

- If you get enough sleep, then you will wake up on your own, without the help of an alarm. If, however, you find it hard to get out of bed, even with the alarm blazing, then consider setting an earlier bedtime because you might need more sleep.
- If you ever need to change your sleeping schedule, try to do it gradually over time to allow your body to readjust its inner sleep-wake cycle.

A good idea to keep in mind when setting a sleeping routine is to be smart with your naps. A quick nap can help you make up for some lost sleep but, if you nap late in the afternoon or you nap for too long, you might upset your sleeping schedule and have trouble falling asleep. To prevent this, try to limit your naps to a maximum length of 20 minutes, and opt for napping in the early afternoon after you've eaten lunch. Another useful tip to remember is to stick to the schedule even when the urge to sleep kicks in, especially after dinner. It's normal to get drowsy as the night closes in, but if you give in to the urge of going to bed earlier than usual, you might wake up during the night and find yourself unable to fall back asleep. So, at all times, follow the sleep-rules you've set for yourself.

The second step you can make to improve your sleep is to cultivate sleep-stimulating habits throughout the day. The things we do during the day pretty much dictate how we'll sleep at night. Thus, it is particularly important to engage in sleep-promoting behaviors and actions if we want to get that healthy sleep. Pro-sleep habits include:

- Control your exposure to light - light exposure regulates our sleep-wake cycle through the action of melatonin (the sleep hormone). When we're exposed to light, the production of melatonin drops, making us active and alert, and when it's dark, the production spikes, making us sleepy. Taking in daylight and natural light can help you normalize your inner day-night cycle, making it easier to fall asleep at night. Some tips here would be to spend more time outside during the day, keep your blinds open to allow more natural light and make sure your bedroom is dark when it's time to sleep.

- Be active - exercising regularly is linked with better, more solid sleep at night, stimulating the restorative and regenerative stages of sleep. You don't have to engage in high-intensity physical activities; short 10-minutes workouts are enough to improve sleep quality. However, you must be consistent with your exercise and have a bit of patience. It might take a few months of continuously being active to see the difference in your sleep. Also, avoid working out at least three hours before you go to sleep because it may hinder your natural ability to fall asleep. However, gentle exercises such as yoga can have sleep-stimulating effects if done in the evening, because they help you relax and unwind.
- Be mindful of your nutrition - avoid as much as possible to have big heavy meals before going to bed since the digestion process might make it harder to go to sleep, and you can experience heartburn and stomach troubles. Going heavy on the fluids before bedtime is another bad idea because it will prompt you to wake up throughout the night to go to the toilet. A good nutrition tip would be to cut back your refined carbs and sugary foods because they negatively affect sleep quality and duration, keeping you up at night. Other things to monitor would be your caffeine and alcohol intake. Caffeinated drinks such as coffee, sodas, and teas and caffeinated products, like chocolate, can hinder your ability to go to bed at your set time. Alcohol also lowers the quality of sleep.
- Avoid nicotine - if you needed another reason to stop smoking, then here it is: nicotine is bad for your sleep. It is a stimulant that will hinder your ability to fall asleep and have a continuous sleep. This also applies to second-hand smoke, so be careful with your smoke exposure!
- Limit bed activities - you want your brain to associate your bed with sleep and hanging around in your bed during the day can hinder your ability to make that association. This change might lead to fewer problems during the night.

The third step that might help you get some healthy sleep is to

establish a bedtime routine. A routine can help your mind and body "understand" that bedtime is coming, making it easier to fall asleep and sleep well. For example, it's recommended that before bedtime you take around 30 minutes to relax. Engage in some light stretching, read, try a deep-breathing relaxation exercise, meditate, or listen to some calming music. We'll talk more about relaxation techniques and meditation in chapter seven. Lower the intensity of your light to stimulate melatonin secretion and promote sleepiness. And last but not least, stay away from electronic devices such as cellphones, tablets, and whatnot. Their screens are very bright, reducing your natural production of sleep hormones, and they keep your mind active, making it harder to unwind and fall asleep (Eyvazlou et al., 2016).

So, what else can you do to promote good sleep? Well, a straightforward answer would be to improve your sleeping environment, meaning your bedroom. If your bedroom is a place of comfort and relaxation, you'll have an easier time going to bed and sleeping like a baby. You can optimize your bedroom by eliminating noise sources; keeping the room temperature comfortable (at around 65° F); installing curtains to block light sources; and choosing or investing in a good quality mattress, pillow, and bedding.

If you often wake up at night and can't manage to fall back asleep, some good tips include:

- Don't stress about it and shift your focus to your breathing or towards the feelings in your body. Controlled breathing or trying other relaxation techniques might ease you back into sleep.
- Get out of bed and do something relaxing, such as reading a book, meditating, or stretching for a few minutes. This will get your mind off the frustration of not falling asleep and improve your chances of catching some ZZZS.

Don't be afraid to experiment with different sleep-stimulating methods. You don't know what might work for you unless you try a wide variety of techniques. A good idea would be to keep a sleep journal and observe your sleep behaviors, monitor how

different techniques are working for you, and analyze what might hinder your ability to sleep. If nothing seems to work, talk with a specialist about your sleeping issues. It’s important to address sleeping problems as to avoid sleep deprivation and make sure it is not causing underlying health problems.

Chapter 6
Mental Exercises that Can Restore Your Cognitive Youth

As we age, our ability to memorize and learn new things changes. The brain is a complex organ that comprises a variety of specialized areas and billions of neurons (brain cells). Memory and cognition issues happen when the brain changes its structure and function because of aging and lack of exercise. While it is normal to experience slight changes in cognitive abilities as we enter our senior years, significant memory loss is not normal. Significant loss may indicate degenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's or other sorts of neurological illnesses. For the average, a healthy person, following a brain-healthy lifestyle, preserves cognitive ability, even in the later years. (Melone, 2020).

But how can our lifestyles promote brain-health and what ensures that we don't lose our cognitive ability with age?

How Can We Improve Cognitive Ability?

To answer the first question, if you want to look out for your brain, the best approach is to stick to healthy habits. Many studies researched the link between cognitive abilities and a healthy lifestyle, with a balanced diet and plenty of physical exercises and found that such a lifestyle lowered the risk of developing dementia or suffering from memory and learning issues (Elwood et al., 2013), (Lourida et al., 2019). A diet high in antioxidants and low in fats was shown to be great for overall brain health (Melone, 2020). Physical exercise was shown to trigger the activation of the hippocampus, the memory center of the brain, and stimulate strong brain-function (Suwabe et al., 2018), (Won et al., 2019).

Besides engaging in a brain-healthy lifestyle that follows the principles we've covered in this book, it is very important to engage in brain exercises. The brain is a dynamic organ, programmed to always be on the lookout for new things to

learn. Think of the brain as a muscle. If you don't use it, it becomes weak, and it dwindles in size. This is known as brain atrophy, and it happens when the neurons and the neuronal pathways (the connections between brain cells, allowing them to communicate and analyze information) are destroyed. The brain atrophies when it stays passive for prolonged periods. Watching TV, for example, as enjoyable as it can be, is a passive activity that does not engage our brains. The same goes for checking our Facebook feeds or consuming any form of media.

Practicing regular brain exercise improves memory, reasoning, and focus. It also promotes vascular health and provides protection from potential atrophy for brain tissue. Research shows that, by diligently engaging in mental exercises, older people can restore their cognitive youth, improve mental capacity, and slow down the cognitive decline associated with aging (Comfort Home Care, 2019).

Now, you don't have to break the bank and invest in games and phone apps that promise to improve brain performance. They might bring some benefits to the table, but, as of now, we have not proven their efficacy through scientific research. Therefore, experts recommend simple brain exercises that involve real-life situations and activities. Almost any silly thing that presents a challenge and involves the use of more than one sense can strengthen brain function. Our brains memorize things through association, which is why we can remember the lyrics of a song but have a hard time learning a poem. The added sense of hearing the melody besides seeing the words allows us to learn faster while also increasing the engagement of our brains.

The more senses we use when learning something new, the more fun and stimulating it is for our brains. An interesting idea for a brain "workout" would be to guess the ingredients in a dish by using your sense of smell and taste. Another culinary idea would be to have your partner purchase an array of fruits and veggies, and you have to guess, while being blindfolded, what they are, relying on texture, smell, and taste. Or you can venture into more creative realism by experimenting with working with different materials, media, and techniques. A

good time to dabble in such brain exercises would be in the morning, after a glass of water and a short workout, to energize your mind and prepare it for a new day, or in the evening to promote healthy sleep!

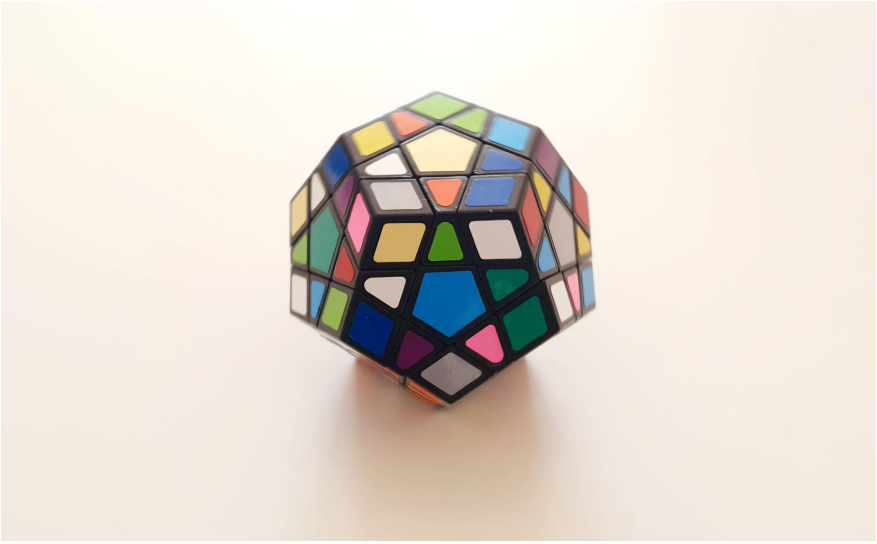
Simple Brain Exercises

So, we've established that mental exercise is quite important, and we know that anything that presents a challenge or puts our senses to the test is stimulating for our brains. Let's look at some simple exercises that anyone can do at home and some tips to keep in mind:

- Solve puzzles - any puzzle provides a good mental exercise for people of all ages. Here we can include Sudoku, crosswords, traditional jigsaw puzzles, and spot the difference type games. Puzzles are great because they are enjoyable, relaxing, and we can easily integrate them into our daily schedule. If you like to read the morning newspaper before or after breakfast, then turn your attention to its Sudoku and try to solve the numbers puzzle. Buy a 500 or 1000 pieces jigsaw puzzle and dedicate half an hour of your evening to figuring it out and putting it all together. Find whatever sort of puzzle interests you more and do your best at adding it into your daily routine.
- Learn a new skill - pursuing a new and exciting activity is not only great for your brain but also your mood. Learning to play an instrument, for example, was proven to slow down the aging process and keep one's mind sharp and strong, regardless of age. Taking cooking classes will stimulate not only your learning abilities but also your senses since you must taste, smell, touch, and see your ingredients. Get into yoga, golf, or other sport that challenges both your body and mind. Pick up hobbies such as knitting, gardening, painting, ceramics, sewing, or sculpting to improve your coordination, focus, and mood while also engaging your creative side. Learn a new language using written, audio, and video materials to engage as many of your senses as possible. In reality, it doesn't really matter what you learn, as long as it's novel

and of interest to you. Just space out and escalate the frequency of your lessons, as not to overexert yourself.

- Try to keep a journal - the simple act of jotting your thoughts on paper is stimulating enough to improve memory, focus, and increase your intelligence. Writing letters to your loved ones, or even just writing on paper things that you want to remember, have similar effects on brain function.
- Test yourself frequently - prepare little challenges for yourself, such as trying a new route when driving home, memorizing your grocery list, doing math in your head without the aid of a calculator, thinking of new innovative ways to do boring chores, and so on. Such simple exercises are effective, and they have the benefit of allowing you to make your own rules.



Puzzle game

If you want to remember recent information, such as someone's name or phone number or some interesting facts you've just heard somewhere, don't feel ashamed to repeat it out loud or write them down. That is how you reinforce the recent memory and make sure the information stays with you. Also, don't hesitate to use items such as calendars, planners, folders, and lists to have routine information always available at your fingertips and ease the burden on your memory. There comes an age when you must conserve your brain energy and use it only when it is necessary. To do so, besides using

planners and such items, it helps to remove clutter from your workplace, have a morning and night routine, use mnemonics (short words, poems, or phrases that aid memory) to remember lists or sets of actions, and have a designated place for everyday items. An example of a popular mnemonic is “My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pickles,” used to remember the order of the planets from the sun, which is Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto (even though Pluto is no longer a planet).

When faced with small lapses in memory, try to manage the frustration positively. Don’t look at it as a sign of your cognitive ability dwindling, but as an opportunity for improvement. If you work hard towards stimulating your brain and believe in yourself, then you will succeed. It’s never too late to put the old grey muscle to the test and restore cognitive youth.

Chapter 7
Two Relaxation Techniques that Can Help You Fight Off Stress and Anxiety

Unfortunately, stress and anxiety are normal standards of our modern lives. We assess our success over how busy we are, and we often forget to take a break and reboot our bodies. It's normal to experience stress from time to time. Our everyday responsibilities or serious life events can trigger stress responses, and, for short-term situations, our natural mechanism of tackling stress can help us cope.

But when you live in a constant state of stress, and your stress hormone levels stay high for long periods, your well-being can be seriously affected. Chronic stress has been linked with symptoms such as headaches, irritability, high blood sugar, fertility issues, tense muscles, heartburn, poor immune response, stomachaches, and insomnia (Pietrangelo, 2020). Prolonged exposure to intense stress can also lead to serious mental problems such as anxiety disorders and depression. Anxiety, too, is normal. We all get that dread before interviewing for a job, leading a meeting, or holding a presentation. But if we don't learn to tune it out and allow it to get full control of us, anxiety can have dramatic effects on physical and mental health, spiraling into symptoms such as panic attacks, lightheadedness, nausea, high blood pressure, unexplained pains, breathing issues, weakened immune system, insomnia, and social isolation (Cherney, 2020).

Learning how to relax and let go of the tensions of everyday life can prevent the negative effects of stress and anxiety buildup and help you perceive things from a different perspective, focusing on a problem-solving approach rather than overthinking every single thing that goes wrong. We can define relaxation as a sense of calm and serenity that allows us to manage negative and destructive feelings. Relaxation has many health benefits for both our mental and physical well-being. Calming techniques can easily be incorporated into

daily routines, making them very accessible to any person in need of such a break. Health benefits associated with relaxation include:

- Reduced chronic pain and tension.
- Lowered blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing rate.
- Increased blood flow towards major muscles and brain.
- Improved digestion.
- Reduced sensation of tiredness.
- Normalized blood sugar levels.
- Better management of negative feelings such as anger, frustration, and low self- esteem.
- Improved mood, focus, and concentration.
- Increased confidence in handling issues and finding solutions.
- Improved sleep quality and duration.
- Reduced activity of stress-associated hormones.

To get the greatest benefits out of relaxation, it is recommended to pair it up with an overall healthy lifestyle (with a balanced and nutritious diet, frequent physical and mental activities, and good quality sleep) and have a good support system with other positive, coping practices such as positive thinking and the ability to find humor in hopeless situations (Mayo Clinic, 2020).

Now that we've covered the impact that stress and anxiety have on the body and the importance of relaxation let's look at two highly efficient relaxation techniques and see how we can incorporate them into our lives.

Autogenic Training

Autogenic training is a relaxation technique that requires the use of body awareness and visual imagery to reduce stress and anxiety. The word "autogenous" refers to something that comes from within, which is why we use autogenic training as a self-help relaxation method. The technique itself is not

novel. It was first introduced in 1932 by Dr. H.H. Sultz, a German psychiatrist, as a treatment for tension and anxiety. Since then, people have perfected the technique to allow others to perform it at home on their own volition. Numerous studies prove its efficiency at inducing feelings of warmth and relaxation (Stetter & Kupper, 2002), (Manzoni et al., 2008), (Science Direct, 2009).

Despite being backed by science, autogenic training is not as popular as meditation, yoga, guided imagery, and other relaxation techniques. This is perhaps because it can be a little hard to practice correctly. We consider it to be a form of self-hypnosis that works through self-statements and words of suggestion, which have the purpose of helping you relax different parts of your body and reduce tension. For example, use mental imagery and body awareness to gradually relax your arms and legs, one by one, slow your breathing, or lower your heart rate. Autogenic training is powerful. If you master it, you can start inducing a state of relaxation by stating, “I am calm,” “Everything is ok,” or other self-calming statements.

So, how does one practice autogenic training, and how can you include it in your life?

First things first, you need to prepare yourself for the relaxation exercise. Find a safe place that’s quiet and devoid of any potential distractions. Loosen any article of clothing that feels restrictive or change into comfy clothes if you can. Lie on a mat or sit in a chair that provides great support for your spine. Place your hands in your lap or the chair’s arms; whichever of the two feels more comfortable to you. Take off your glasses or contacts and recline in the chair. Now you’re ready to start.

Start by practicing some breathing exercises. Try different forms of deep breathing before relaxation exercises. Try diaphragmatic breathing by placing one hand on your upper chest and the other on your abdomen and taking a deep breath as you count in your mind (usually up to three). If you do it correctly, only your core should move. Hold your breath for a second and then exhale, allowing your stomach to fall back into its position as you count to three. Continue for five to 10

minutes to clear out your mind and prepare for the exercises. Taking slow, even breaths also works, if you want to be less technical about it. As you calm down, add a self-statement such as “I am calm” or “I feel relaxed.” Feel free to make up your own sentence.

Concentrate your attention on your arms and begin telling yourself slowly and softly, “My arms feel very heavy.” Repeat this six times, then follow up with your statement from before, “I am calm.” Refocus your attention and repeat this stage, this time telling yourself, “My arms feel very warm” before repeating your statement. We associate the feelings of warmth and heaviness with relaxation, so that’s why these sequences are important.

Now focus your attention on your legs and repeat the same routine you’ve done for the arms. Repeat “My legs feel very heavy” six times, say “I am calm,” then repeat, “My legs feel very warm,” six times followed by another “I am calm.” Remember to speak slowly and softly.

For the next stage, you must quietly repeat to yourself, “My heartbeat is calm and steady” six times, followed by, “I am calm.” Then you can go on to tell yourself, six times, “My breathing is calm and steady” and end again with “I am calm.”

Now, you need to focus on your abdomen and tell yourself, six times, “My abdomen feels warm,” followed by, you guessed it, “I am calm.” Next is your forehead, but this time you’ll repeat six times “My forehead feels cool” because relaxation is associated with “cooling” your head. End this sequence, too, with another, “I am calm.”

Take some time to enjoy these feelings in your body and just relax. Once you’re ready, you can end the session with a statement like “My arms and legs are firm, breathe in and open your eyes,” or whatever you feel is appropriate.

If you’re having trouble getting into the calming state, try to listen to an audio guide and follow along with the speaker’s directions. If you experience feelings of restlessness or anxiety while you’re practicing autogenic training, stop immediately, and seek professional help before attempting it again. If you’re

struggling with a psychiatric or medical condition, it would be a good idea to get in touch with your health care provider before trying any complex relaxation techniques. A professional can give you more insight, help you decide if a technique would be beneficial for you, and provide more information on how to practice the said exercise safely.

It's best to integrate autogenic training into your afternoon or bedtime routine, as it will help you reboot your mind and body and prepare you for a good night's sleep.

Meditation

Unlike autogenic training that's unpopular and complicated, meditation is perhaps the most mainstream relaxation exercise because of its accessibility. Anyone can learn how to meditate. Once you've mastered the ways to meditate, you can practice virtually anywhere. Meditation is a workout for the mind that focuses on controlling your thoughts and achieving a state of inner peace and harmony.

The benefits of meditation include increased feelings of well-being, lower heart and respiratory rates, less intense anxiety and stress, improved blood circulation, lower blood pressure and stress hormone levels, better quality sleep, and the ability to achieve a state of deep relaxation (Gaiam, 2019). There are many types of meditation and, respectively, many ways in which you can put them into practice.

Mindfulness meditation seeks to increase your self-awareness and help you break free from loops of negative thinking—those who wish to achieve a deeper bond with the universe or a higher being practice spiritual meditation. Focused meditation uses similar practices to autogenic training, helping you get in touch with your body and relax on a deeper level. Movement meditation is the act of letting your mind wander while you're engaged in physical activities such as walking, hiking, or yoga. Mantra meditation uses a chant or specific word to root you into the meditative state and help you clear out your mind. And transcendental meditation is a customizable form of the latter one, allowing you to pick your own mantra to focus on or follow along with guided

meditation material.

Meditation

If one of these types of meditation resonates with you, I encourage you to seek out more information and try it out! For now, I'll present steps and tips for basic meditation, which is simple and can help you relax at any time.

- Start by finding a quiet place and sitting in a comfortable position. It can be on a chair, on the ground, lying down, or sitting cross-legged on a mat. Go for whatever feels more relaxing to you but be careful to maintain correct posture, with a straight back, shoulders pulled back, and your head level.
- Set a time limit for yourself of about 5 to 10 minutes. Brief sessions are better for beginners since it's difficult to stay focused at first. You can gradually work your way

towards a 30-minute session by adding in a bit more time with each practice.

- Gently close your eyes and relax your facial muscles. Try to eliminate tension from every part of your body and achieve a state of relaxation and comfort. When you feel that something is tighter than it should, take a deep breath and refocus yourself on relaxing.
- Concentrate on your breath as the air goes in and out. You can try a deep breathing technique here if you're having a hard time focusing.
- Notice when your mind strays away from your breathing and makes an active effort to refocus. Don't be too hard on yourself when this happens. Remember that this is only your first try; it's bound to be a bit difficult to get into it and put your thoughts aside. So, acknowledge when you find yourself hooked on your thoughts and try to let go. Be kind and gentle with yourself. As you experiment more and more with meditation, you'll be able to keep your focus for longer and truly become a master over your mind.
- End on a gentle note, by slowly opening your eyes and taking in your environment. Give yourself a few seconds to assess your feelings and thoughts about this new experience.

Start small, set time goals for yourself, and don't be afraid to experiment with different sorts of meditation. For example, some people listen to instrumental music while they meditate to have something to latch on to and follow as they tune out their thoughts. Other people prefer to meditate while they walk or run, concentrating their focus on taking in the views and living in the moment. Find the type of meditation that works best for you and your daily routine and make a habit out of it.

Remember, meditation can be adapted to you, so don't stress too much about following rules or sticking to guidelines. As long as it does the job of relaxing you, then you're doing it right! And keep in mind that there is no moment like the

present to practice a relaxation technique and improve your life!

Conclusion

That's a wrap on the longevity guidelines that I follow daily. Let's quickly summarize the secrets of living a long, happy life! First, we must watch what we eat and at least try to have a balanced diet. That means knowing how to make the best dietary choices, how to portion our foods, and what to avoid. Remember always to check the labels and recommended serving sizes of whatever food item you want to buy and to opt for organic, locally sourced produce whenever you have the option! Also, keep in mind that if you're going to help your body filter out toxins, you always have the option of following a detox diet. Even if you don't go all-in with a juice or liver cleanse, you can still detoxify by cutting out harmful elements of your diet for a week, including caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, and processed foods, or you can support your body simply by eating cleaner.

Second, we need to listen to the signals our bodies are sending and drink plenty of fluids when we're thirsty. You need not follow the eight glasses a day rule or force yourself to drink more fluids than you are physically able to. Don't understate or overstate your thirst, and you'll be fine! Physical and mental exercises are the other pillars of a healthy lifestyle, and if you put effort into them, you'll help to ensure that both your physique and your mind stay young and spry for as long as humanly possible. It doesn't take much to include a 30-minute walk and some crossword puzzles or Sudoku into your daily schedule, so start on this double workout journey.

Third, we need healthy sleep. Improving the duration and quality of your sleep is truly a game-changer. Whether or not we like it, we are cranky and slightly unpleasant when tired. Good sleep will give you a better, more positive perspective on life, and you'll notice the changes right away! Finally, you can't improve your well-being if you don't put some effort into managing the stress and anxiety of everyday life. Negative feelings pile up when left unattended, and they take a significant toll on our minds and souls. Relaxation techniques

help you reboot your body and regain full control of your emotions and thoughts.

I know this plan can seem overwhelming. It's difficult to change your entire lifestyle, and you shouldn't stress about doing everything at once. Change takes time. Take it one step at a time, and, little by little, as you implement these principles into your life, you will see the results for yourself. So, how about you take that first step today and start investing in your happy, healthier future?

I wish you a happy, long, and fulfilling life.

P.S.
Help me, please!

As an independent author with a small marketing budget, reviews are my livelihood on this platform. If you enjoyed this book, I'd really appreciate it if you left your honest feedback. You can do so by clicking the link below . I love hearing from my readers and I personally read every single review.

Link to review page

Thanks in advance.

Greg.

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