

STOP. CHALLENGE. CHOOSE.™

3 Steps Towards Creating Optimal Health

An introductory guide to creating a
healthy body and mind

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



Introduction

Chapter 1 Stop:

Are You Where You Want to Be?

Chapter 2 Challenge:

How Healthy Are You?

Chapter 3 Choose:

To Make Your Health A Priority

Chapter 4 A Better Way:

Blueprint For A Potentially Longer,
Healthier Life

Chapter 5 The Weight Challenge:

Living In A Candy Shop

Chapter 6 Fueling and Drooling:

Eating Healthy For Life

Chapter 7 Solving the Deskbound Lifestyle:
Steps Into Motion

Chapter 8 Your Bed and You:
Becoming Friends Again

Chapter 9 Becoming Bulletproof:
Reducing Stress In Your Life

Chapter 10 Your Health Bubble:
Protecting You

Chapter 11 Love Your Life Now:
Organizing Differently

Chapter 12 Optimal Health Practitioner:
Your New Life Plan

Conclusion

Where To Go From Here

Preface

If you could achieve optimal health, would you want it? If you said yes...great. And I'm sorry to say, desire alone is not enough. There are over 30,000 diets on the market, people spend millions on gyms, and still, we fail to achieve our health goals 85 percent of the time.

So what is required?

While most people have the desire, they often lack the correct theory and proper method to achieve and sustain the vibrant health that they crave.

Desire + Correct Theory + Proper Method = Predictable Transformation.

The good news: Transforming your life and creating optimal health is possible. This e-book provides a predictable optimal health system that has transformed tens of thousands of people.

The system and this e-book were created by Dr. Wayne Scott Andersen, New York Times best-selling author of [*Discover Your Optimal Health, Dr. A's Habits of Health*](#) and its companion guide, [*Living a Longer, Healthier Life*](#). He has been named as "Top Physician of the Year" by the American Consumers Council for his revolutionary work in nutrition and lifestyle medicine. He also is Co-Founder and Medical Director of Take Shape for Life, an optimal health company.

Dr. Lawrence Cheskin, MD, FACP founder of the Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center, says Dr. A's system "offers a simple, practical way for people to transform."

Our goal is that this e-book will inspire you to make health a priority and start making simple yet profound changes that can be transformative for you.



Introduction



I, like many of you, finished school and went to work. I came from a humble family that helped to put me through medical school, two residencies, and two fellowships. As one of the first board-certified critical care physicians in the country, I was focused on making a difference. I worked day and night to help fight the neverending battle of combating disease.

Introduction

I thought I could fix the problems with all my advanced training and *Star Wars*-inspired medical technology.

I was wrong.

I kept people from dying, and if that had been you, I am sure you would have appreciated it. But I came to realize that the system of healthcare I was trained in and practicing was simply treating a bunch of symptoms and disease states. We were doing very little to help people really create health in their lives.

In fact, we were enabling people to make bad decisions and continue habits that were not in their best interest. And that very system was having a growing negative impact on my own health and life. The brutal hours (sometimes days without sleep), little time for my family, infrequent exercise, and eating junk food on the run between stressful crises in the ICU were draining my energy and my overall well-being.

One night, I returned home from a particularly stressful day in which a nurse accidentally stuck me with a needle while I was performing CPR on a drug addict. It was about three in the morning, and I walked into my little girls' rooms and realized that I might have just been given a death sentence with that needle stick and I might have never seen my babies grow up.

Fortunately, the story has a great ending. I didn't contract any life-threatening disease from the needle stick that night, and I decided to redirect my focus away from disease and to begin helping individuals create healthy lives, starting with my own!

Over the last 15 years, I have transformed my life from that of an overworked, perpetually tired, unhealthy, stressed-out doctor to a life where I am healthy, happy, and in control of every aspect of my well-being. I went from hardly spending any time with my family to organizing my life around them and around what is

Introduction

most important to me. I have radiant health, unlimited energy and enthusiasm, great social and community relationships and live an abundant life that I would not trade for the world.

The best news is this system can work for you, too!

If you apply the lessons we are going to go over in the next 12 chapters, you will be on the path to transforming your own health and life. There is no secret formula. There never was, and there never will be. It will take a decision and some work on your part.

On the other hand, with a strategy, some simple skills, tools, and the proper support, your journey can be fun and also quite rewarding. One support piece we have developed to help you is the **Stop.Challenge.Choose. 12-Week Health Transformation** that follows this book, giving you additional support and insight as you progress through this material.

Stop.Challenge.Choose. is a free tool that can guide you on your journey toward optimal health. It includes emails and videos from me so we can share some of the things you can do to improve your health and your life. In addition, if you are not already working with one, we will provide you a free health coach to guide you and to answer your questions. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Whatever you decide, let's get started!

CHAPTER 1

STOP.

Are You Where You Want to Be?



STOP.

For a moment I would like you to stop, take a deep breath, and silence the chaos. Jump off that hamster wheel. Close the door to your office. Take off the electronic leash. Put the kids to bed. Put your headset on and play some nice background music. Switch your devices to airplane mode.



Stop

I want this time to be all about you. It's time to give yourself a moment.

How are things going? If this was your last day on earth, how would you say you are doing in relation to all the things that are most important in your life?

I don't know what you are thinking right now, but the people I help often say that things aren't going so well in some—or maybe many—areas of their lives. Most appear to be functioning in a state somewhere between numb and full-out denial. How did life get so crazy? How did I lose control over so much around me? Why does each day seem to belong to everyone else but me?

You probably are not sure exactly how it all got this way, but that isn't really important. It's kind of like the flu; do you really care where you got it? The real question is actually, "Do you want to change it?" If you want to make a change, we can do that. In baby steps. Day by day. We can put you in control, and over time your circumstances will no longer be in charge of your health and your life.

It starts by knowing what you want!

We have let runaway technology become the driving forces in our lives over the last 50 years, allowing gadgets and conveniences to permeate every aspect of our lives. As a result, we have been clearly changed forever.

Some changes have been for the better, like advances in space exploration or in healthcare or in our ability to communicate and to exchange ideas. At the same time, technology has made our lives more complex. We can read emails and watch television anywhere, and with driverless cars on the horizon, we won't even have to turn a steering wheel to get from one place to another.

Stop

Most of us have simply accepted this acceleration in technology and worked at finding more hours in the day to react to our increasingly complex lives, making our smart phones the first and last things we look at every day. Unfortunately, the effect on our lives has not been positive. In fact, we are the first generation who, when surveyed, responded that the quality of our lives has diminished over a previous generation's.

The demands placed on a human today in terms of daily sensory stimulus and activities is taking its toll on our health and happiness. In fact, our very well-being as individuals and as a society is in jeopardy. Each of us needs to decide if the life we are currently leading is allowing us to have what is most important to us and our health. If it's not—and this will be true for the majority of readers—we need to stop our current journey and challenge ourselves to evaluate what we want out of life

Recent research has pointed to several key areas which determine how healthy and fulfilled we are in our lives. They are the elements of well-being that separate individuals who are thriving from those who are struggling and suffering. The data shows that how we spend our days in terms of our vocation—or, put plainly, liking what you do every day—is the most important factor in creating well-being.

Other key areas are having great health and energy, effectively managing our economic lives, having strong relationships and love in our lives, and creating a strong connection to our communities. Two-thirds of us are doing well in at least one area, but only 7 percent are thriving in all areas.

Over the last 15 years, we have used a very simple formula to help people evaluate their well-being. It focuses on the three key areas that are principally responsible for optimal health. As a physician, I initially had a strong bias to the physical aspects of our health based on biomedical or purely physical health parameters. As I dove deeper into what it meant to truly achieve optimal health, the importance of psychological and social interaction to a balanced, healthy life became clearer. In fact, all three areas are interdependent, and how they work together will determine the quality and health of your life.



Stop: Are These Important To You?

The Essence Of Optimal Health

There is a simple formula to evaluate your well-being, and it encompasses the big picture of your health. It focuses on the three key areas that make up the Trilogy of Optimal Health—Healthy Body, Healthy Mind, and Healthy Finances. Optimal health, in the way that we use it, simply means being the best you can be with where you are in life. For example, optimal health looks different at age 22 than it does at age 42.

The following Venn diagram illustrates that the intersection of the three key areas, the point where each part of the trilogy balances with each other, is optimal health. Without a balance of all three, optimal health cannot be a reality. Unfortunately, most people focus on one area to the detriment of the others.

Are These Important To You?

The 3 Key Areas Of Well-Being (Or Stress)

Physical Health:

- Healthy Weight
- Eating, Moving
- Sleeping
- Relaxation
- Safe and Healthy Environment, both at home and work

Mental Health:

- Strong Relationships
- Community Involvement
- Time for Spirituality
- Engagement and Motivation at Your Job, Hobbies



Optimal Health
Reach Balance in All Three

Financial Health:

- Abundance: debt-free, savings and retirement, child's education
- Having enough money to do the things you want and to make long-term investments
- Resources to create experiences and memories with family and friends
- Successfully managing your economic life of steady income and cash flow
- Community contribution



Stop.

Are You Paying Attention?

One of the key elements of **Stop.Challenge.Choose.** is about finding ways to slow down and pay attention to where you are right now. It's an important first step on your journey to a better, healthier life, because it can help you rediscover your self and what really matters to you.

I know you looked over the key areas of well-being and maybe gave them a little thought. I am asking you for more. I want you to really dive into these essential parts which can create meaningful improvement in your health and your life. In order to help you get the most out of this section, I want you to look inward and explore the real you. I want to connect you to a simple exercise that is available to all of us. If you are already using it, great. If not, I think it will become a trusted friend to help you stop when your day is spinning out of control. It will help you slow the chaos, park your stress, and rebalance yourself. There is no better way to pull yourself back from the abyss of bad choices than to take a deep breath and focus on your breathing.

Are You Paying Attention?

Breathing is essential to life, but it's often overlooked in our everyday shuffle. As a critical care physician, one of my most important roles was to maintain this essential function when a person was too sick to do it on their own. When a person is not breathing properly, life dissipates quickly.

The same can be said for those who succumb to a lack of awareness. The life in them dissipates. It starts slowly at first, but eventually a toxic world takes its toll over time if we go through our day without thinking of what we are doing.

You can use your breathing to take back control of your life. Our breathing is controlled by two very different mechanisms, and both are essential to becoming conscious of what is going on in your day-to-day life. The primary control is automatic and maintains this vital function, allowing you to go about your day without giving it much thought. Yet at any time you can immediately take control and override the system, giving you the power to disengage cruise control and capitalize on the finer points and benefits that manual control provides.

When you take over, you tap into your nervous system. You can slow everything down by taking some slow, deep, focusing breaths to regain your awareness of what you are thinking. You can take control when you are reacting to any of the many events in your day that may produce stress. We will help you develop this habit to help you stop, challenge why you are feeling stress or anxiety, and choose the action that moves you toward well-being and health.

Here we are going to tap into your automatic pathway and become an observer of your breathing. This exercise will allow you to start experiencing the benefits of relaxation and awareness of your body's status.



Take A Moment For Yourself

This simple exercise can fundamentally change your life. There is such a powerful relationship between your body and your mind that you can literally redirect your life by tapping into that connection.

We will use this technique immediately to help you deepen your understanding of what is most important to you and how well you are taking care of those key pieces. In addition, as we continue your transformation, we will use this exercise to help you stop and re-calibrate yourself to make sure you are choosing the outcomes that support your health and life goals. Let's begin.

Stop, and take a moment for yourself.

Shut your door or find a quiet area, loosen your clothes and sit in a comfortable chair or sofa or lie down if the situation allows you.

Relaxation Exercise

Close your eyes.

Without in any way trying to alter your breathing, begin moving your focus to your breathing. Simply pay attention to each breath as it is happening. As you breathe in, notice the air moving through your nostrils, and notice as your body fills with life-giving air on the rise or fall of your abdomen or chest. Notice at the end of inhaling how that feels and then follow as the air reverses and your chest or abdomen rises or falls. Really feel what it is like to breathe without feeling a need to alter your breath.

If your mind wanders, that is fine. Gently bring your focus back to your breathing. You can note why you were distracted, such as noise, but bring your attention back to your breathing.

Once you feel yourself totally connected in the moment, expand your awareness to take in the area surrounding you. As you become more aware of your surroundings, slowly open your eyes and bring the exercise to a close.

How are you feeling now? How have these few moments of focus impacted your emotional and physical state? Do you feel the stress melt away? If these few moments made such a difference, what can a lifetime of being focused and aware do for you? How can you grow from this?

Now let's use your heightened awareness to explore your current state of health!

Many people refer to this as mindfulness. It has many different expressions and meanings for different philosophies and religions, such as prayer or meditation. I am using it specifically to take us out of automatic and focus on what we are doing to our body in terms of unhealthy lifestyles and lack of clarity and focus of what creates well-being.

CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGE.

How Healthy Are You Really ?



Challenge.

How Healthy Are You Really?

We know that eating right will improve our health, yet in the moment we can't help but grab the cheese burger or eat the sugary doughnut. One doughnut can't really lead to obesity or diabetes, can it? We know we should be more physically active, but our favorite TV show is on. My kid has a baseball game tonight, but I am buried at work and he won't mind. My friend has asked me out to dinner three times, but I blow them off because I am just too busy. I find myself going shopping every time I really get stressed, and yet when I get my credit card bill, I am under even more pressure.

Let's see how you currently stack up in the parameters which determine the quality of your life:



Well-Being Evaluation: Physical Health

Physical Health includes many key areas, including reaching and maintaining a healthy weight, healthy eating habits, robust physical activity, high-quality sleep time for relaxation and a safe and healthy work, home and play environment

In these key areas of physical health, give your best estimate as to where you think you are on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being optimum. If you are not exactly sure where you are, take your best guess and don't worry; we will get more granular later. I have a thoughtful health assessment that will go much deeper when you are ready. For now, put your total score at the bottom or write it in a journal.

	Bad		Poor					Good		Optimum
Weight Status	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Eating Habits	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Physical Activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Sleeping	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Relaxation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Safe and Healthy (Work/Home/Play)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Score ___ / 60



Well-Being Evaluation: Mental Health

Mental Health includes many key areas, including strong relationships, community, making time to follow spirituality, and engagement and motivation at your job, hobbies, etc.

In these key areas of mental health, give your best estimate as to where you think you are on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being optimum. If you are not exactly sure where you are, take your best guess and don't worry; we will get more granular later. I have a thoughtful health assessment that will go much deeper when you are ready. For now, put your total score at the bottom or write it in a journal.

	Bad		Poor		Fair		Good		Optimum	
Most Relationships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Attitude at Work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Meaning and Purpose	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Spirituality Time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Community Service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Hobbies/Fun	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Score ___ / 60



Well-Being Evaluation: Financial Health

Financial Health encompasses many key areas, including abundance (an attitude that your life is full in terms of resources) which includes having enough money to do the things you want and the means to create experiences and memories with family and friends. It also includes the confidence that comes with knowing that you can pay your bills and care for your family.

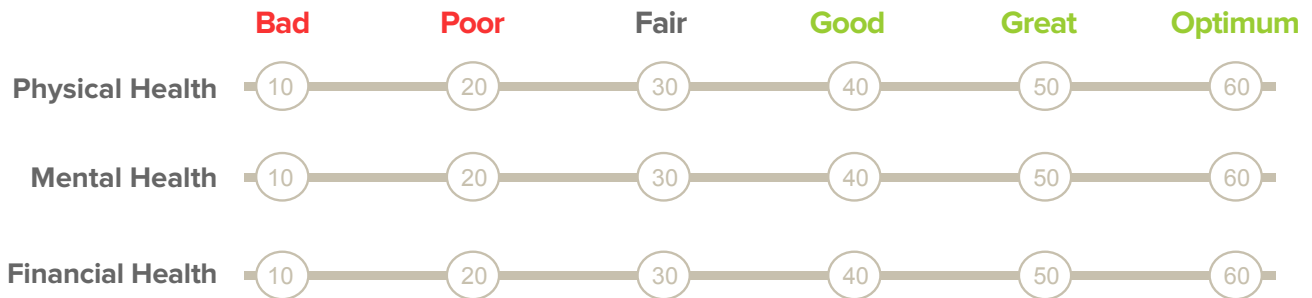
In these key areas of financial health, give your best estimate as to where you think you are on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being optimum. If you are not exactly sure where you are, take your best guess and don't worry; we will get more granular later. I have a thoughtful health assessment that will go much deeper when you are ready. Put your total score at the bottom or write it in a journal.

	Bad		Poor		Fair		Good		Optimum	
Abundance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Resources to Minimize Stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Money Management	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Money to Do What You Want	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Resources to Create Memories/Experiences	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Community Contribution	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Score ___ / 60

Well-Being Evaluation

What Was Your Score In The 3 Key Areas Of Well-Being?



What Was Your Cumulative Score?



How Are You Doing?

Your score gives you a good idea of how you are currently running your life. Our well-being is a great measure of how we are doing in terms of the quality of our life. If it needs improvement and you want to do something about it, you have come to the right place. If you have been operating mindlessly and have allowed your short-term desires to dictate your daily lifestyle, we can help you choose a different path, one that will build for you the currency of a life that matters and allows you to thrive in what is most important to you.

Optimal Health is really about organizing your life around the key areas that we have identified, empowering you to create well-being and making sure that your daily choices support those long-term objectives! In the next chapter, we will start building the process that will construct a new pathway to guide you on your journey to optimal health.

CHAPTER 3

CHOOSE.

Do I Choose To Make My Health A Priority?



Choose.

The scores in the well-being evaluation in chapter two give you an idea of how you are currently running your life. It is a reflection of the daily choices and habits that make up your routine. If you are not happy with your scores, do not feel too badly about yourself. Instead, you should be excited by the possibility of elevating your life to a new world of rich, vibrant health.

Before we focus on choosing your path to better health, let's watch a few stories of people who decided to change. These individuals transformed their lives using **Stop.Challenge.Choose.**, and they can give you a sense of just how far-reaching your own transformation can be.



Average weight loss for Clients on the Optimal Weight 5&1 Plan™ with support is 20 pounds.

Watch this video and see for yourself what can be achieved when you decide to **Stop.Challenge.Choose.**



You are at a crossroads right now. You can choose to create health in your life—using our simple, proven model for creating and sustaining optimal health—or you can stay as you are.



Do I Choose To Make My Health A Priority?

This fundamental decision to improve your health and your life will immediately change the initial conditions in everything you do. The amazing part is that as you improve in each area, even in small ways, the other areas of your life will be affected as well, creating advancement in your overall well-being. Similar to the butterfly effect, the simplest increase in the positive choices combined with the decrease in negative choices will trigger a chain of events that will help you transform your health and your life.

The Butterfly Effect - Theory that small initial differences may lead to large, unforeseen consequences over time.

At the core of my teachings is the principle that anyone can create meaningful, lasting change by fundamentally making this simple shift by combining the slow and fast variables of change: strategies (slow) and choices (fast).

We must first develop a process to help you create the best possible future for you.



The Process Of Change

Decide

Decide that you want to improve your health and your life. In the very second this occurs and you choose optimal health, you change your orientation.

Start

In the beginning, you simply have to start paying attention to the daily choices that support the essentials of well-being. In the next chapter, we will outline a blueprint of long-term strategies (slow variables), a sort of map to help you navigate your transformation. Once you have direction in the key areas that determine your new optimal health path, it's a matter of making sure you understand the daily choices (fast variables) that support and determine your well-being.

Health And Life Goals Set Your Direction

The key to lasting change is to minimize the effects of previous behaviors while building new behaviors that support your overall goal, which is to have the control to be the creator of your health and your life. That starts with having a clear understanding of what is most important to you. Now that you know where you stand in terms of those desired outcomes from the optimal well-being evaluation, you have the foundation for better deciding the direction of your life.

Develop New Habits

I have spent the last 15 years studying the importance of habits in helping people change their behaviors. Once you know where you are going, your choices will be guided by what you want. At each little fork in the road, you will make the decisions that lead you in the right direction. This will make it easier, because you are selecting the choices that will align with your long-term goals. Your baby steps toward optimal health—as small as they may seem—will help you to gain momentum in creating optimal health.

Because every choice you make has a consequence, creating optimal health comes down to making the right choices. The problem is you do not necessarily get immediate feedback on the choices you make. So you have that cheesecake today because you seek immediate gratification and believe that it will not have any long-term negative impact on your health or weight. But if you really become aware in the present and observe how you felt after you ate that cheesecake and relieve the immediate desire, you may actually see its negative impact and how it affected your work, energy level, or thinking in that moment. In the next chapter, we will explore how habits control many of our decisions and how we can help them fall in line with building your well-being in the key areas.



Your Optimal Health Community

The other key to helping you develop optimal health and long-term success is to change your underlying structure. The environment you surround yourself with is very powerful in determining your habits and behaviors. This includes your work, family, friends, social life, and community. Throughout this e-book we will look for opportunities to improve your surroundings to support your transformation, and evaluating your environment is a great place to start.

Based on what you have learned about optimal health and well-being, evaluate your environments—work, home, and where you socialize. Are you more or less likely to succumb to Habits of Diseases that are eroding your health in a particular place? How do the people around you influence the decisions you make about your health? Write down your thoughts and observations in a notebook and become more mindful over the next few days. If these relationships need some boundaries or change, we will dive deeper into that topic in Chapter 10.

In the next chapter, we will create a blueprint for the best possible you.

CHAPTER 4

A Better Way

Blueprint For Your Health Transformation



A Better Way

Blueprint For Health Transformation

In order to plan your trip, we first need to know where you want to go. The well-being evaluation in the second chapter started to force you to take a long, hard look at your current reality. With that perspective, there are many different places to start your transformation based on how much conscious control you are currently using to navigate your life. You may be where you are intentionally, but most people actually spend more time planning their vacations than they do planning their lives.

Here, we want to establish which components of the three key areas of physical, mental, and financial well-being you anticipate needing the most attention to move you to a thriving state of well-being. Think of this as taking a trip across your whole nation. As you leave from your home town to travel 1,500 miles, you certainly can't see your destination. You need a map or a GPS to guide you. You know that someone has come before you and charted the most direct route to reach your journey's end.

You simply have to get on the road and follow the roadmap.

It will take you where you want to go. The miles will go by slowly at first but will soon begin to pick up speed. That is how your progress toward well-being will occur. If you are expecting an immediate, complete transformation, you will probably be disappointed. This is the reason why most people have good intentions but do not succeed in the long-term. They have watched too many movie characters like Rocky who transform from a bum to a hero in two hours. Frustrated by the slowness, they succumb to immediate gratification because they are not rewarded immediately for making good decisions.

That is why we want to make sure you are clear on what you really want, because you will need to do some things you do not want to do or that may be challenging. Make choices because they will help you reach your desired outcomes of radiant health, greater involvement, more time for your family and friends, and to make memories, not because you want the quick satisfaction of a sweet snack.

Once you have figured out what is most important for you to work on, we will give you a series of secondary choices to jumpstart your progression in those areas. Fast variable changes (small wins) will give you quick improvements while we lay the building blocks—the Habits of Health—to support long-term success.

Our goal in this e-book, along with the help of the companion online 12-Week Health Transformation, is to begin laying the foundation for Optimal Health. Your mastery of the Habits of Health and the impetus to change your underlying conditions will help you build equity in the key areas of your life. Now let's take what you learned about yourself in your well-being evaluation and put it to work.



A Better Way

Your Health Transformation Goals

Primary Choices

Each of the three areas of optimal health contains individual elements that are responsible for determining well-being. For the best results, check the main determinants that will help you create well-being in a particular area and prioritize the factors that you most need to address. They will usually be areas in which you scored the lowest earlier in this book, so look over your notes if you need to refresh your memory. Keeping your results nearby will serve as a daily reminder, helping you to make the choice that supports these long-term goals. You are the CEO of your life. Only you have control of your thoughts, actions, and results. What does optimal health mean to you?

Your Health Transformation Goals

Physical Health

- Healthy Weight
- Healthy Eating
- Healthy Physical Activity
- Healthy Sleep
- Healthy Relaxation
- Safety and Healthy Work/Play

Mental Health

- Most Relationships
- Attitude at Work
- Meaning and Purpose
- Time for Spirituality
- Community Service
- Hobbies/Fun

Financial Health

- Abundance
- Resources to Minimize Stress
- Money Management
- Money to Do What You Want
- Resources to Create Memories/Experiences
- Community Monetary Contribution

Secondary Choices:

The Habits of Health

These are the individual Habits of Health, a series of daily choices that forms the building blocks of optimal health. Each positive choice that you make in a single day will make little detectable difference that day, but over time will make all the difference.

As we turn them into permanent habits of choosing the right meal, spending more time with our kids, and moving more during work, we will start to affect the way we perceive the world around us. These little changes to your routine will produce enormous benefits for your health, energy, attitude, productivity, finances, and even, potentially, your happiness.

Before we dive into the many ways we can start improving your health and your life in the following chapters, I want to explain the central process for how habits are created and how we are going to harness that mechanism to transform your life.



Anatomy Of Your Habits

Running Your Life

Most people do not realize that 40 percent of our daily actions are not conscious decisions but instead are unconscious, leaving much of our lives to run on automatic. This is a product of our evolutionary biology. If we had to consciously focus on every task and detail related to our survival, we would never get anything done and probably not notice the saber-toothed tiger sneaking through the brush. So our bodies adapted. We learned to internalize routine tasks, freeing our brain's processing power to focus on more important details while our subroutines clipped along with little active attention from us.

In today's technologically advanced society, we would have a breakdown if nature had not given us such a robust automated system to manage all the complex and simple tasks we must accomplish to get through the day. Unfortunately, the small microprocessor deep in your brain called the basal ganglia cannot tell the difference between good and bad habits. So it is going to be our job to build new, healthy habits to support and strengthen the healthy habits that you already have and to change the ones that are not benefiting you or supporting your goals.

How Are Habits Made?

In the beginning, when you are presented with a situation or a task, you decide what you want in any specific situation. Later, once you have done it a few times and the basal ganglia has processed it, you stop actively thinking about the task and it becomes automatic. After that, it only needs a cue and your brain's subroutines will ferry you through the task with very little thought as long as there is some reward to reinforce the behavior.

It starts as simply as this: You see a candy bar (cue); you purchase, unwrap, and eat the candy bar (routine); and you get a great-tasting treat (reward).



A Craving Is Born

Once our brain learns that a candy bar is a delicious, sugary treat, the very sight of the candy bar creates an anticipation of the sugar high. If we do not get it, we are disappointed. Over time, as we experience the repeated high from the treat, we start craving the high from eating a candy bar. You now have created a craving loop that can be quite powerful and totally unconscious!



How Your Habits Are Made

Craving loops become automatic and that is why it is so important to find out what it is you are craving in order to either stop, change, or modify habits that are not serving your best interest.

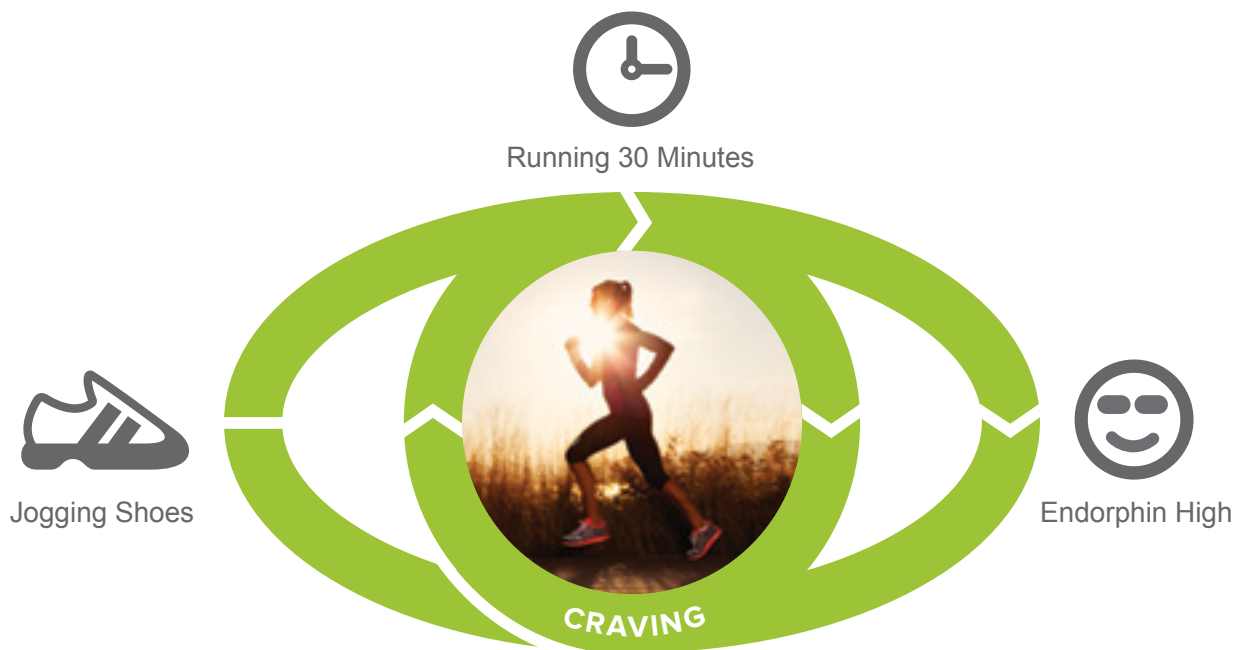
Look at how the desire for a little distraction can turn into a habit loop.

Say you are in a long meeting and repeatedly look at your phone for the stimulus of a text message or a new Facebook post from a friend. That brief distraction from the boring meeting is rewarding, so we can't help but look at our phones again and again, hoping for the reward. In fact, this habit—this need for mental stimulation and interaction with our friends—can become so powerful that some cell phone users have reported “phantom vibrations.” They swear that they feel their phones vibrate in their pocket, but when they check, they don't have any messages. Stranger yet, some people have reported this sensation when their phones were off or not even in their pockets.

The simplest of rewards can morph into powerful habits, for better or for worse. And once a craving for it occurs, it takes some work to correct if they are not serving us.

Creating New Habits Of Health Loops

If we can rationalize the importance of exercise and help you to find something you are willing to try, we can build on your body's natural tendencies to form habits. Let's say we send you to jog with a friend and we make sure that you have the right shoes, the right jogging conditions, and the right companion. At the end of the jog, you receive the reward of feeling great, either from the endorphins or from the sense of accomplishment. Soon, we have set up a habit loop. Over time, if you place your jogging shoes by your bed in the morning, you can use visual cueing to set a routine of a 30-minute run and reinforce it with the reward of feeling better after jogging. Those endorphins can create a craving that leads to you wanting to jog.



HABITS OF HEALTH LOOP™



You Can Replace Your Bad Habits

The process for creating a new Habit of Health, like we discussed in the jogging example previously, can help us understand how we program Habits of Health. Once we understand the structure that supports the Habit of Health that we would like to put in place, we can systematically create new healthy habits. To unweave the bad decisions and replace them with good choices is a little more difficult. The first step is to become aware of emotions and cues that lead us to respond with unconscious bad choices. The second is to reprogram the routines that are hurting us while holding on to the cue and the reward. In this way, we can move toward physical well-being and establish new healthy habits that serve our long-term goals. As we build more and more of these good habits while unweaving the bad ones we create a powerful burst of momentum where each individual action supports the next.



Breaking Your Pattern By Using Stop.Challenge.Choose.

The critical mechanism I teach is to have people redirect their unhealthy behaviors. This helps you to instantaneously take back control. In essence, you are breaking the cue-driven response by becoming aware of unhealthy triggers. Use this any time you are feeling stressed, perceive a threat, or sense any other negative feeling:

Stop. Refocus on that exact moment instead of automatically reacting. I have people take a drink of water so they don't respond negatively with words or actions. Just Stop.

Challenge. Instead of responding with an impulse-driven bad habit, ask yourself "Why am I feeling this way?" and question if making a knee-jerk response serves your best interest. Here is where you bring in the discipline of correct choice by picking the healthy response that supports your long-term well-being.

Choose. The response that supports your more important desire, which is long-term health.

Reprogram Your Unhealthy Habits

One of the simplest ways to replace a bad habit is to keep the same cue and reward but to change the routine. You are substituting a Habit of Disease for a Habit of Health!

For example, you desire to relax with your spouse after dinner, so you currently have an after-dinner drink. In this scenario, the habit structure looks like this:

CUE: After dinner

ROUTINE: Drink

REWARD: Time with spouse to relax, craving: intimacy

A healthier habit structure would look like this:

CUE: Finish dinner

ROUTINE: Go for a walk

REWARD: Time with spouse to relax, craving: intimacy

As you can see, the cue and the reward is the same, but we've switched out the routine. With this approach, we still get to experience that powerful satisfaction, but we do not sacrifice our well-being.



Health Is Contagious

To help strengthen these habits, making them permanent, connect with a person or a group with goals similar to yours. We will delve into this topic in great depth later in this book, but start to think about the people in your life that could give you the support you need to rebuild your habits. Having a community of health is ideal for building belief and confidence, and it is also important for modeling and association. While you are finding an optimal health community in your area, you are welcome to join our community online and to connect with a health coach so that you can also enjoy one-on-one support from an expert.

Next, we will begin to explore your physical health, which will build the foundation for a great discussion later about your mental and financial health.

The Power Of Stop.Challenge.Choose In Breaking Your Pattern

*This was a blog written recently by Robert Fritz, The Father of the Creative Process and Structural Dynamics. He is an Internationally recognized Best-selling Author, Composer, and Film Director.

My friend and colleague Dr. Wayne Andersen has developed a phrase that at first can seem a little unusual. Stop, challenge, choose. What do those words mean when strung together? And herein lies the wisdom of his technique for people to change their orientation quickly, helping them become more conscious of what they are doing, and more in control of their long range aspirations.

Here is a typical situation: You are at a party, and the waiters and waitresses are walking around with some of the most fattening refreshments. Even though you have been diligent in adopting a healthy diet, your hand automatically reaches for what's on the tray. Before you know it, the food that is inconsistent with your healthy approach to eating is in your mouth, and you are chewing and swallowing it. Yet somehow you know that this is not exactly what you told yourself you'd be doing. Nonetheless, you're doing it anyway.

This is an automatic response to the situation you are in. However, the response is an example of mindlessness rearing its ugly head. On the way home, you come to your senses and realize you have violated your resolve. This is usually followed by guilt-tripping yourself for the next few hours or days. But don't worry, your guilt-trip will have no lasting impact, and the next time temptation enters the picture, you will react the very same way. Where, you think, is your will-power?

Actually, what Dr. Andersen knows is that will-power has nothing to do with it. The underlying structure you are in does. Appetites and impulses demand instant gratification. When this is the dominant orientation at play, you have little sense of past or future. Everything seems immediate. You are not able to think in terms of health and well-being, or anything else except eating that bacon, cheese flavored little pizza with the high salt and sugar content that, while small, is 3000 calories each, and you've had 7 of them already. This is the last thing you decided you would be eating.

Reprogram Your Unhealthy Habits

And here is the beauty of Dr. A's technique. The first verb is stop. That means exactly what it says. Instead of reacting instinctively to the moment, give yourself a moment to think, reflect, become self-aware, and mindful. This only takes a moment. But without that moment, the hand is quicker than the unconscious mind, and you will find yourself gorging on the worst rubbish you can imagine. This stop moment enables you to take a step back from the abyss and come back to your senses.

The next step, challenge, is so different from the usual guilt-trip techniques that always backfire. Here Dr. A is helping you set up structural tension. What is the overriding outcome you want to achieve? Would eating this thing in front of you help you accomplish that goal? This enables you to re-establish the vision you have for creating health, and position that against the current reality. Challenge here means consider, review, self-consciously make apparent the conflict between short-term impulses and long-term health. Which is more important, which one will you decide is senior? Your choice, but a choice formed from a mindful awareness rather than mindless instinct.

And the final verb, choose. Now, you have the power of choice back under your control. You can decide to eat what is in front of you or not. Once in a while, a trip to the land of junk food won't hurt long term. But too often, at first it is once in a while, and then more often, and before you know it, it is back to old bad habits that work against you.

What Dr. A has set up in this last step is the ability for you to make a primary and then secondary choice. If developing health is primary, than, to support that outcome, the secondary choice would be to avoid eating unhealthy things. This is not giving up anything, but understanding the hierarchy of desires, and organizing your life around those things that matter more rather than those things that matter less.

CHAPTER 5

The Weight Challenge

Living In A Candy Shop



The Weight Challenge

You have probably heard it said that even the most mediocre smart phones of today have exponentially more computing power than the system that first put a man on the moon. Can you believe that the device in your pocket is more powerful than the one built for taking humans into space and back?

Of course you can. Each year, computers get smaller, faster, and more powerful. It's become such a normal process that we barely consider it. However, have you ever tried to run an old computer program on a new computer?

The Weight Challenge

Even the simplest programs have compatibility issues, but many of them will still actually run. When they do run, however, the results are strange. These programs were designed to run on a relatively miniscule amount of memory, and when they are suddenly given access to the memory capabilities of modern computers, they are overloaded. The programs can run so fast that they look like something out of a cartoon, making a once perfectly usable program a chaotic, self-defeating mess. They simply aren't designed to handle the abundance of resources now available in modern computers.

Now let's turn back the clock and consider where our internal systems started.

We were hunter-gatherers. Food was hard to come by, so our bodies developed mechanisms for using energy efficiently. When a hunting party lucked into a big catch, our bodies worked to store as much of the extra energy as possible because we couldn't be sure when the next meal would come or how big it would be. We were lean, mean, hunting (and gathering) machines that spent most of our days on the move.

Today, our bodies are still using the same internal software, but our resources are radically different. Food is easy to come by, and we've moved from eating all-natural foods to processed foods loaded with sugar and high-fructose corn syrup. Where calories were once a precious resource, we are now swimming in them. On top of that, many of us live sedentary lifestyles, working at desks all day only to hang out on the couch when we go home at night.

Our software is still in hunter-gatherer mode, so we are storing large amounts of fat and overloading our bodies with unhealthy foods that we were never designed to handle.

We are living in a candy shop that our ancestors could have never even imagined, and it's slowly killing us.



Your Candy Shop

Understanding Your World

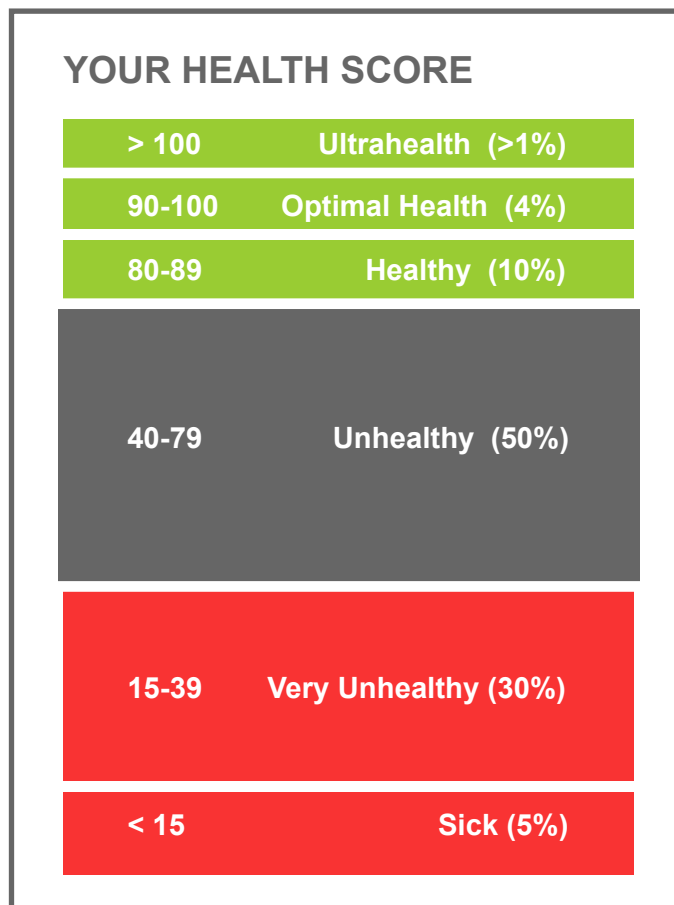
One of the key facets of the **Stop.Challenge.Choose.** method is awakening us to our surroundings and actions, or becoming mindful. We've already begun to lay the foundation for a life where we are making conscious decisions, but it takes practice. Our lives are complicated, and in many cases our choices and behaviors can be so ingrained that they are almost entirely unconscious. We don't realize that we've eaten too many potato chips until they're gone or we don't realize that we've overdone it on the wine until the next morning.

Many of the people I help face similar challenges, and I've found that taking a moment to evaluate where your physical health is currently can help you see the bigger picture of your overall health. In chapter two we evaluated your health in the three key areas. But here we want to focus on your physical well-being. Go to DrWayneAndersen.com and take the in-depth health assessment.

Understanding Your World

Before you start your health assessment, there are a few points to keep in mind.

As it was with the other exercises you've done already in this e-book, there are no wrong answers. Being honest with yourself now will give you the best chance at success later. Also, be sure to note the health score that you receive and compare it to the provided chart. This chart depicts the health continuum, from sick to non-sick to optimal health to ultrahealth. The higher the number, the healthier you are. Before you begin the health assessment, take your best guess at where you think you'll score on this continuum.



When you take the health assessment, compare your guess to your actual score. It can be easy to feel disheartened if you receive a less than favorable result. If your score is low, we are going to work to fix it, and you won't be the first to have taken this journey. By reading this e-book, you have already begun. That's something to be proud of.

This score will give us a metric for evaluating your progress throughout your optimal health journey. Your initial interest in optimal health may have been to reach a healthy weight, but by now you are probably starting to see that health extends much farther. It even goes beyond our bodies, extending into our minds, our relationships, and how we fill our days.

How we fill our stomachs

I want to reinforce how your environment influences our health choices and why it is critical to be mindful and make the right choices in advance. Research shows that less than 1 in 10 people who went to a typical fast food restaurant even claimed that they could resist the temptation of unhealthy options. Think you'll be OK and order a healthy salad? Think again. That just makes matters worse. People were three times more likely to select an unhealthy option (French fries) if a healthy option such as a salad was on the menu.*

So remember:

Stop: Before you decide where to eat.

Challenge: Where can I eat that serves healthy food (you will make better choices).

Choose: A healthy food restaurant or bring a healthy snack or meal replacement with you before you leave.

**Journal of Consumer Research*,36(3),380-393



Thriving In A Candy Shop

Building A New Habit

In chapter four, you learned about the structures of a healthy life and some basic strategies for harnessing the power of habits to better your health and your life. To illustrate how cues, routines, and rewards can affect our daily lives in ways we may not realize, we discussed how one might develop the habit of buying a candy bar while waiting in line at the grocery store. It's a common challenge in our modern lives, and it's relevant to the discussion we had in this chapter.

So let's look at that habit's structure again:



HABITS OF DISEASE LOOP

In keeping with the strategy that we learned last chapter, let's try to replace the routine in this cycle to re-teach our body how to handle the cue of seeing a candy bar.



HABITS OF HEALTH LOOP

Stop.Challenge.Choose. You stopped, grabbed a glass of water, and challenged why you wanted that candy bar, ultimately choosing to pursue your life goals rather than your immediate cravings. You could reinforce this experience with a note in your journal, or you could talk to your health coach about your triumph.

CHAPTER 6

Fueling And Drooling

Eating Healthy For Life



Fueling And Drooling

The optimal health trilogy defines our overall health and is a valuable tool for refocusing your perspective of you, your current state, and your goals. I would argue that no one area is more important than the other from a big-picture view, but it tends to be most practical to address our physical well-being first. With your health in order, you have the energy and the confidence to make meaningful changes in the other areas of your life as well as the longevity to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Eating healthy is a challenge, though, because every expert seems to have their own take on what is good and what is bad, and every perspective seems to contradict all of the rest. Should you go Vegan or Paleo? Should you or shouldn't you eat egg yolks? What supplements should you take? How about one of those cleanse things that you heard that woman in your yoga class raving about?

Fueling And Drooling

You don't need me to tell you that there is a lot of static in the health & wellness industry, but you do need someone to help you cut through the noise with practical, reality-based advice.

When I talk about nutrition, I approach it from my perspective as a physician. Anything I recommend to you is grounded in medical research, and I've used these recommendations to help thousands of people like you make lasting changes in their health. Before we get into changing the habits you have surrounding food, we need to talk about why we eat. Then, we can have a more informed conversation about what we eat.

We eat for two reasons: fuel and gratification. The first is pretty straightforward. Our bodies need energy, so we consume it in the form of food to power everything we do. If we don't eat, we die. In a modern society, however, fuel is rarely hard to come by. Our problem is instead that we have too much fuel, so we have started to form habits where we eat not because we are hungry but because we desire gratification. We might eat food to celebrate a special occasion, and we might eat food because we are feeling badly about ourselves.

In creating Habits of Health, I'm not going to ask you to stop enjoying food. I am, however, going to challenge you to make nutritional decisions that are grounded in the context of your bigger goals. While we will talk about some of the basics of what to eat and when to eat it, one of your biggest projects will be to undo the habits that cue you to eat when you aren't really hungry or that cue you to eat far more than you really should.

When you can break those Habits of Disease and follow them up with Habits of Health, you create the potential for dramatic, and very positive, changes in your health.



Energy Intake

The Formula For Weight-Loss

The science of weight loss is not complicated. To burn fat, you need to burn more energy than you have taken in, forcing your body to use up the energy it has stored as fat. In order for this process to be done in a healthy, manageable way, the calorie gap between the energy you have consumed and the energy your body requires to function should be large enough so you burn fat as an energy source. You can create this disparity by using techniques that lower your energy intake. Exercising is a great way to maintain your healthy weight but not great at actually helping you lose weight, and if you are overweight, it can cause injury to your knees, back, etc.

We can go into great detail about this topic (and I do, in my best-selling books), but for this brief e-book, I want to give you a reasonable starting point. To start, forget what you know about the food pyramid, and instead picture a nine-inch dinner plate. Half of that plate should be fruits and vegetables, one-fourth should be protein, and the last fourth should be starches (carbohydrates).

At first, this may not sound filling, but if you fill your portions with low-glycemic foods, you can make your meals feel more substantial without taking in unnecessary calories. Since we are limited by space, I've made all of my low-glycemic shopping charts available for free on my site at habitsofhealth.com.

The Formula For Weight-Loss

My goal is to help you lower your total calorie intake using portion control (meal replacements can be a great help here as well) while increasing your intake of white meat and key foods, like vegetables, fruits, nuts, fish, legumes, extra virgin olive oil, and red wine in moderation. At the same time, we will decrease the intake of red and processed meats, sodas, whole dairy products, commercial bakery goods, and sweets.

Now that you have a better sense of what to eat—and it's okay if you have some learning to do on that front—let's use our previous discussion of why we eat to explore the “how” of the change you need to make.

One of the most basic cues that challenges nearly all of us is to eat the food we have in front of us. We have taught ourselves to eat until our plates are empty rather than stopping when we feel full. And we've taken that habit and applied it to bags full of chips and sleeves full of cookies. To make this cue work for you, use smaller plates (I recommend nine-inch plates) and avoid eating in the kitchen. If you are having a snack, never eat directly out of the bag. Take a small sample and leave the room. You should also try taking smaller bites and chewing longer to give your body a chance to feel full before you go after second helpings.

Some of the more difficult habits to re-weave are the ones rooted in emotion. The cues for these habits can be sadness, rejection, anger, loneliness, or something as mundane as boredom. We might reach for a candy bar when our boss yells at us or we might grab a gallon of ice cream if our plans fall through. These are prime opportunities to **Stop.Challenge.Choose.** and to create new routines.

Your awareness is the key here. If you can recalibrate the way you handle these situations, you can eliminate one of your largest sources of unnecessary calories.



Managing Energy Intake

Becoming Aware Of Your Triggers To Eat

We need to eat when we are hungry. That is the correct time to actually put food in your mouth. If you reflect on your daily life, however, you will likely find that you eat for many more reasons other than hunger. Falling into these traps is all too easy, and the influx of unnecessary calories can quickly add up to excess fat.

Later, we will look at an example of a cue-routine-reward cycle that relates to food to give you an idea of how to reprogram your habits. To help you identify areas where you might need to use this process, consider the following list that outlines some of the situations that may cue you to load up on calories when you aren't actually hungry. Once you're able to identify these problem areas, you can insert an alternate routine to help you turn your Habit of Disease into a Habit of Health.

Becoming Aware Of Your Triggers To Eat

- Food as a Habit: Eating without paying attention
- Food as a Stress Reliever
- Food as a Reward
- Food as a Boredom Reliever
- Food as a Social Facilitator
- Food as Love
- Food Because it's There!

Which are your Achilles' heels?

If you're like most of us, you have several, creating a compounding effect that results in a massive influx of unnecessary calories. In a given day, you might absentmindedly eat a few M&Ms from your officemate's candy bowl. You might eat an extra snack while you dig through that intense project. After work, you might drop into a happy hour to celebrate the completion of a big initiative. While you're there, you eat an appetizer and have a beer as you talk with friends. At home, you might eat an extra piece of cake because you had an argument with a family member. Late at night, you might grab a few extra bites of that same cake because, well, it's there.

These small choices, over the course of a single day, can account for a significant amount of unneeded energy for your body. If you plot the progression out over a week, a month, and a year, you start to see the power of habits.

So let's harness the power of habits to serve you, not hurt you!



The Emotional Eating Response

Reprogramming A Bad Habit

The phrase “comfort foods” is commonplace for a reason. Food can very easily become an emotional crutch for coping with some very painful emotions. Unfortunately, overeating only temporarily relieves that emotional pain and instead leaves us worse off than we started. Not only is the original problem still there when the ice cream is gone, but now we are on track for all of the challenges that can come with obesity.

To put us on the course for optimal health, let's first understand the structure of this habit:



HABITS OF DISEASE LOOP

To truly come out ahead in this situation, we need a routine that will help us deal with the stress that our boss may have caused us. Instead of eating a bag of M&M's, we could use the breathing exercise we learned in the first chapter.



HABITS OF HEALTH LOOP

In this version of our habit, we are able to experience the same reward without the harmful side effect of consuming unhealthy food and excess calories. You now anticipate fulfilling the craving for comfort by the stress release of breathing away the angst. We may even come out farther ahead because we are practicing a mindful way of dealing directly with the way the cue makes us feel rather than simply covering it up with some sugary food. Take a moment to reflect on your other habits of eating and work to restructure them in this same way.

CHAPTER 7

Solving The Deskbound Lifestyle

Steps Into Motion



Habits Of Motion

Most of us understand on the most basic level that we should exercise and eat nutritious food, but as we learned in the last chapter, making the right choices can be difficult even if our hearts are in the right place. We know that we should exercise, but what program should we follow? Which of the new fad fitness programs is right for us? How much will not exercising actually impact our health?

First of all, understanding that the benefits of exercise extend beyond weight loss is important. You have already learned that obesity is connected to a wide range of health complications, but even if you are not overweight, living a sedentary lifestyle can put you at risk for disease and can shorten your life. For example, sitting at a desk for long periods of time can restrict circulation, and the limited amount of activity can increase your chances of developing type 2 diabetes. And that's in addition to other health challenges, like back pain, misaligned hips, and carpal tunnel syndrome—all of which can lead to chronic pain that make you even more likely to avoid activity!

Habits Of Motion

To create lasting, vibrant health, you need an approach to exercise that is both accessible to you now and practical enough that it can be maintained indefinitely. Current research suggests that 60 percent of us get no regular physical activity and that 50 percent of us who begin exercising quit within six months.

Let's make sure you are not a statistic.

Rather than prescribe a weight-lifting routine or an intense cardiovascular routine, we are going to incorporate Habits of Motion into your daily life, making them a part of your natural, daily activities. In terms of weight-loss, your physical activity level is an important part of the way you manage your body's energy intake and expenditure. If you are not burning more energy than you are taking in, your body will store unused energy as fat. Once you have reached a healthy weight, you will want to recalibrate your energy expenditure to match your energy intake so that you can maintain that healthy weight.

Beyond weight loss, increasing your physical activity level will help you prevent the diseases and health complications that we discussed earlier, and it will ripple into other areas of your life as well. You will find yourself sleeping better, and you will probably find yourself feeling happier and more fulfilled, because exercise has been shown to release endorphins and to eat up the chemicals produced by stress. It also gives us time to be with ourselves and become more aware of our thoughts and feelings.

You can begin to enjoy these rewards without an intense workout routine. The Habits of Motion are accessible, and they will help you to rethink your daily choices. Armed with just a few principles, you can adjust a series of few—seemingly very small—choices to take your health in an entirely new direction.

The Six S's of Success

Taking control of your energy balance starts with six surprisingly simple categories. In the Habits of Health system, these S's fit into what I call the NEAT System. NEAT stands for Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis, which is what I promised. We are not doing a workout program. We are changing the way you approach even the most mundane aspects of your life and adding activity. Workout routines have their place, but for now, this approach is more important and will have a larger overall impact on your well-being.

The Six NEAT Categories

Stance: When the muscles that support your body's core axis—the chest, shoulders, back, legs, and abdominals—are aligned properly, they create balance throughout your body. Focusing on these foundational muscles helps you burn more calories and provides great training for your transition into more exercise. Think about your posture at the office, in the car, and at home.

Standing: Merely moving from sitting to standing can substantially increase your energy consumption. When you stand, you begin to use weight-bearing muscles. Try to stand more in the office, on the computer, or on the phone, and stand even while you're at home making dinner or watching television.

Strolling (Walking): Walking in terms of the six S's is done outside of any formal walking programs (which are also useful). You can incorporate more walking into your routine by going to the water cooler, walking down the hall to speak with a coworker instead of emailing them, or by walking around the mall.

The Six S's Of Success

Stairs: Stairs are a great way to accelerate your energy expenditure. In fact, climbing just one flight of stairs is the equivalent of walking 100 steps. Therefore, climbing ten flights of stairs gives you the same benefit as a half mile of walking.

Samba: Never pass up an opportunity to enjoy the rhythm of a song. If you can't take a moment to dance, tap your pencil or foot or even sing to yourself. With music, you can activate your brain as well as your muscles.

Switch: Do things by hand instead of by machine. Wash your dishes by hand, stand up to change the channel, and put away the electric knives.



Creating More Motion In Your Life

Building A New Habit

Sitting still is easy. In fact, many of our modern innovations and advances have been specifically designed to make it easier for us to just sit still. These conveniences can rob us of valuable activity and lead us to a life of inactivity. In your life as it is today, there are likely a multitude of cues that trigger you to begin a routine of inactivity.

To move you closer to achieving your health goals, we need to identify these cues and work to reprogram them. Let's start with this example of after work television viewing:



HABITS OF DISEASE LOOP

The need to unplug from the stress of your work day is very real, and later you'll learn just how important it is to disconnect from what could be a hectic day of obligations, but watching television will not improve your health. Let's try this Instead:



HABITS OF HEALTH LOOP

Choosing to go to Yoga instead of watching television can produce the same reward of taking your mind off your day in the office (in fact, the reward might even be stronger). In your routine, yoga might not be your exercise of choice. You could go for a long walk. You could take the kayak out on the river. You could take a martial arts class. You could even go outside and work in your garden. The key is that you use exercise to relax instead of a sedentary activity like watching television.

CHAPTER 8

Your Bed And You

Becoming Friends Again



Habits Of Sleep

Together, we've begun a conversation about health. I suspect that you've talked about your health before with friends, with doctors, with personal trainers, or with any number of arm-chair gurus. I also suspect that most of those conversations talked about diet and exercise and stopped there. In my view, that's a mistake, and that shortsightedness is why many people yo-yo with their health plans. They make a positive change only to slip back into Habits of Disease. Then they change again only to relapse yet another time.

If you only fix part of the problem, making lasting progress is nearly impossible. It's a bit like buying three new tires for your car instead of four. Three of your tires may be in pristine condition, but as soon as that one tire wears out and goes flat, your car is unusable.

Habits Of Sleep

Sleep is one of these essential car tires. If your Habits of Healthy Sleep aren't in order, the rest of your health will suffer. For how important sleep is, though, we tend to give it very little attention. We stay up late after a stressful day of work, watching television or playing on our phones to help us unwind, and then we wake up early, drinking three or four cups of coffee to get ourselves through the day.

Once we are trapped in a cycle of sleeplessness, every other aspect of our health can begin to unravel.

THE STAGES OF SLEEP: ONE SLEEP CYCLE

Sleep Latency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time to fall asleep• Starts when you close your eyes and ends when you fall asleep
Stage 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Light sleep
Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brain waves slow down, resting the parts you use while awake
Stage 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deeper sleep; restorative• Delta waves
Stage 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Especially recuperative; restores and recharges the body• Delta waves• Essential to the sleep process
REM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The deepest sleep• Characterized by rapid eye movements• Body (arms and legs) otherwise motionless• Dreaming; active brain waves similar to when thinking

Habits Of Sleep

Not only can sleeplessness leave you feeling mentally blurry and irritable—serious problems themselves—but it can also disturb your appetite regulation, contributing to weight gain and ultimately, the problems associated with obesity. Sleeplessness has also been linked to heart disease, increased inflammation (which can lead to cancer), and a 50 percent increase in your risk of viral infection.

Sleep is nature's nurse. When we limit its role in our lives, we can't fully enjoy the benefits that regular, restful sleep provides. Even one night of inadequate sleep can ruin our mood, impair our judgment and sour our interactions with everyone else.

Sleep is your body's way of restoring organ function, stabilizing chemical imbalance, refreshing areas of the brain that control mood and behavior, and improving your overall physical performance. During the day, your brain is too occupied to process everything, so it uses sleep as a chance to replenish spent nutrients, repair its circuitry, and process the experiences that you had during the day.

Most of these processes occur during a 90-minute cycle that includes REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. Without enough of these cycles, we begin to feel the consequences ripple throughout our lives.



Creating A Lifestyle Of Sleep

Organizing Your Life Around Rest

It may seem odd to suggest that you organize your life around going to bed, but that's the reality of what it takes to have healthy, restorative sleep. From the moment your alarm goes off, you begin to make choices that will affect your ability to rest at night. Below, I've outlined a typical day full of Habits of Healthy Sleep to give you a model to incorporate into your own life.

- Abandon the snooze button. Wake up right away and get into bright sunlight. If the sun isn't up yet, turn on your lights.
- Coffee can be a part of a healthy morning routine as long as you don't have it with sugar, which can overstimulate your body too early. Avoid having coffee, or any other kind of caffeine, after noon.
- Set aside some time to exercise. Exercising later in the day is fine as long as you do it before 6 p.m. to avoid feeling restless when you close your eyes to sleep.

Habits Of Sleep

- Do your best to avoid long naps. If you need a boost, take a five-minute power nap instead.
- When you leave work, wind down in preparation for your bedtime. Avoid checking email or checking your messages from work. Relax. Enjoy a hobby or spend time with your family.
- Set your bedtime, and stick to it, counting back seven hours from when you need to wake up to determine the ideal start to your sleep latency period, or falling-asleep time.
- With a bedtime set, establish a routine and don't deviate from it, even on weekends. Changing your behaviors, even for a few days, can sabotage your sleep. Have a nice cup of relaxing tea.
- Minimize other liquid intake two hours before you sleep to keep yourself from having to use the restroom during the night.
- Decrease stimulation 30 minutes before you plan to sleep by shutting off cellphones, televisions, and other devices.
- Take a Melatonin supplement, as directed, to help regulate your sleep hormones if a long day at work or travel has interrupted your usual sleep routine.
- Use ear plugs and a sleep mask to block out distractions when you lie down for sleep.
- Commit to starting your day when your alarm goes off so that you can tackle a new day full of potential and rich with opportunities.

Like exercise and nutrition, adjusting your routine to achieve healthy sleep can be challenging. Talk to your health coach when you stumble and consider adding some tools that can help augment your sleep.

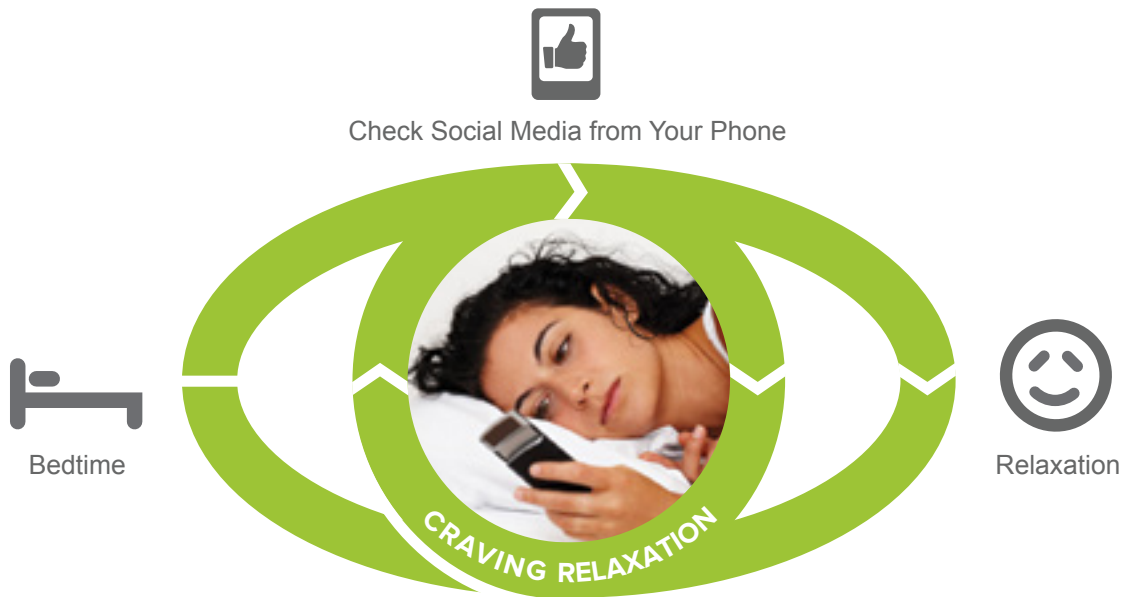


Setting The Stage For Sleep

Reprogramming A Bad Habit

Even though you just learned multiple ways to help you sleep soundly and restfully, I know that reading a page in an e-book won't create instant results in your life. The habits that are hurting your sleep now have been reinforced for years. You need to identify each of the cues for these habits—starting from the moment you wake up—so that you can replace your Habits of Disease with Habits of Health.

For this example, let's look at a common nighttime habit:



HABITS OF DISEASE LOOP

The tricky part of this habit is that you may feel relaxed looking at Facebook or Twitter before you go to sleep, but the brightness of the screen and the mental stimulation of content can actually keep you from falling asleep. Instead, let's replace your routine with an activity that is actually relaxing:



HABITS OF HEALTH LOOP

In this new habit, we turn off the cell phone and take a hot bath, perhaps listening to relaxing music and enjoying the fragrance of lavender at the same time. By using this routine, we can still get the reward of relaxation without over-stimulating our brains. After the bath, we can go straight to bed and enjoy the fruits of healthy, restful sleep—as long as we ignore the temptation to turn on our phones again, of course.

CHAPTER 9

Becoming Bulletproof

Reducing Stress In Your Life



A Healthy Mind

Stress, like much of our evolutionary software, served a practical purpose for our distant ancestors but now poses a significant health challenge in a modern context. Stress, at its most basic level, is a survival response. When we feel threatened or in danger, our body produces chemicals and hormones designed to help us fight or take flight.

In small doses, this response can save our lives. In large doses over a long timeline, however, we can suffer a number of consequences. Under stress, our bodies temporarily suspend the normal function of otherwise important systems—like immunity and digestion—much like Captain Kirk in *Star Trek* might divert all of his ship's energy to forward shields in the heat of battle. Outside of battle, the rest of the ship needs to run normally if the crew is to function efficiently and productively.

A Healthy Mind

According to the Mayo Clinic, stress can lead to a number of health complications, like anxiety, depression, heart disease, and memory impairment. Managing your stress can also be a key factor in reaching and maintaining a healthy weight in addition to getting healthy, restorative sleep.

As it is with nutrition, exercise, and sleep, failing to create a healthy mind will cripple the progress you have made in other areas of your life and may even undo the good work that you have done. The sooner you address the stress in your life, the sooner you can enjoy a peaceful, fulfilling life. You may discover that your stress comes from within, or maybe it comes from your job, or maybe it comes from certain influences within your community.

But I would be hard-pressed to believe that there is not some facet of your life—if not several—that is causing you stress.

According to the American Psychological Association, 22 percent of Americans report suffering from “extreme stress” and more than half (53 percent) of Americans reported that stress was the source of personal health problems. On top of that, in a survey conducted by Harris Interactive (on behalf of Everest College), 8 out of 10 people reported that they are stressed about their jobs.

I suspect these statistics don’t surprise you. The way stress affects us and the people we care about is generally pretty easy to see. At its core, stress is usually a combination of fear and unhappiness, two emotions that can rob you of your ability to make informed decisions about your health and can derail you from living a life that you feel is fulfilling.

In this chapter, we are going to learn more about how you can cope with stress and how you can restructure your life so that your daily routine is spent in an environment with people who support you and your happiness.



Fulfillment And Success

Separating You From Your Stress

Thinking about your life and what might be causing you stress can quickly turn into a source of stress in itself. Your life is complex, and you likely come across a few hundred potential stress stimulants in any given day. Instead of dissecting all of these fine details, let's talk about the bigger picture of fulfillment and success.



Separating You From Your Stress

The fulfillment continuum is a gradient between fulfillment and depression. Rating yourself on this line helps you to determine how you feel internally about your life. Are you content or are you feeling badly about yourself? The success continuum—a gradient between failure and success—is mostly external. What level of achievement would you say you enjoy now compared to where you'd like to be? Are you comfortable with your current financial situation or professional position?

When you put your scores for these two continuums together, you can get a better sense for where in your life to look for sources of stress. If you feel worn out but you are successful, it may be because your job is taking too much time away from what really matters most to you, like your friends, family, or personal passion. If you feel content with your life overall but feel like a failure, you may need to take a look at your goals and make new moves to capture the achievements that have thus far alluded you.

With this rough idea of where you are, set aside some time to think about what really matters to you in terms of both of these continuums. This process may make you uncomfortable, but like any good exercise, a little bit of focused effort now is worth the results you'll see later.

Once you determine what you want, start to think about what's keeping you from having it. You may have to admit that your job is sucking your enjoyment out of life and that it's time to find a new opportunity. (Remember, it's twice as important to love what you do on a daily basis than the other factors). You may find that a particular person on your Facebook is constantly negative and as a result perpetually pulls you into that negative space.

You might also consider taking up a new hobby, enjoying the arts, going outside and exploring nature, or spending more time with your family and friends.

Don't let stress define your life. You should define it, and you have the power to make your vision your reality.

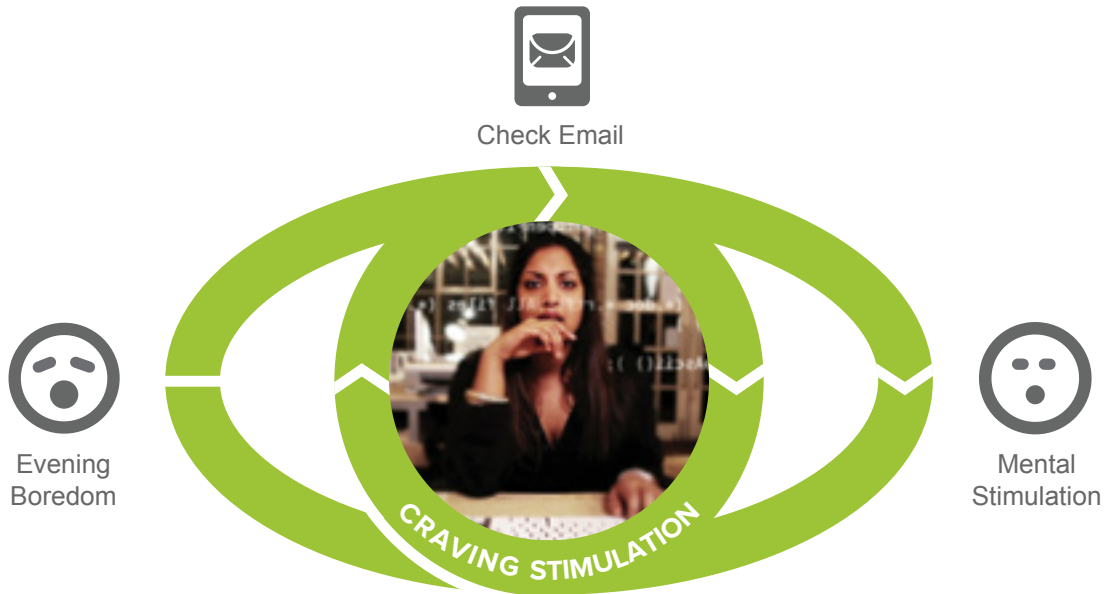


Winning the Battle Against Stress

Reprogramming A Bad Habit

Defeating stress can be a challenge because it can hide in the shadows and strike when we least expect it. For example, many of us are guilty of checking our work emails late at night, and I'm in this group as well. Our phones ding with a notification, and we can't help but read the new message. Unfortunately, if a negative email comes through late at night, it can ruin our sleep and, worse yet, it can distract us from enjoying time with our families. So let's dissect the structure of this habit:

Reprogramming a Bad Habit:



HABITS OF DISEASE LOOP

Some phones let you set a timer, automatically turning off notifications at a certain time. If yours does not have that feature, turn off your email notifications entirely and check them manually during the day. That way, you won't get beeps and buzzes in the evening, and you won't read that email from work that ruins your evening. Instead, pick up a good book to get the mental stimulation that you crave.



HABITS OF HEALTH LOOP

I'm not asking you to ignore your work. Instead, I'm encouraging you to set boundaries. If your work needs something urgent, they will call you. An email can wait. Make it your routine to stop checking your email after a certain time, and start looking for other stress cues that you can unweave as well.

Your Health Bubble

Protecting You From An Unhealthy World



Creating An Environment Of Health

Your health is determined almost entirely by the choices you make, and that theme has dominated much of our conversations so far in this book. What might not be so clear is that you can actually choose what factors will influence your future choices right now. To ensure your long-term success and to make your lifelong journey easier, you need to create and live within an environment that is aligned with your goals.

For example, many of the people I work with have reported that they found it much easier to make the right nutritional choices when their family or friends joined the pursuit of optimal health. Before that, the lone individual that strove to create health was surrounded by junk food and by people who—meaning no ill will—would encourage that individual to skip workouts or to have an extra helping of dessert.

Creating An Environment Of Health

When the entire family has the same goal, however, they form a miniature support network. They lean on each other and the success of one individual radiates through everyone else, providing inspiration and strength. In an environment like this, not only are temptations less common, but they are easier to overcome when they do arise.

Those early morning walks are easier to take when a friend is holding you accountable and encouraging you. Having water with dinner instead of soda is easier whenever everyone else at the table is doing the same. Conversely, it's difficult to be the only one that passes on the after-work drink. And it's hard to be the only person who heads to the gym if the rest of your friends and family are staying in to watch television.

Let's be clear: I'm not telling you to dump your friends and family. You do need to be aware, however, of the role they play in your health and life. If you are going to be the only one in your social network that is serious about creating and achieving optimal health, you need to be vigilant and you need to have a plan for handling the challenging situations you may find yourself in. You may even have to talk to the people you care about and explain your situation, asking them to be supportive of your goals.

In the end though, we want the world around you—your own little health bubble—to be in sync with the best “you” that you can be, and we're going to learn how to make that happen.



The Optimal Health Community

Building Your Support System

Traditionally, your support network is comprised of individuals, and that's a great place to start. We are also going to look beyond people and into the world you live in to ensure that even your physical surroundings work for you and not against you. Let's start with your physical surroundings, because you may find it easier and faster to make small changes in this area.

For starters, get rid of all the junk food in your house. No last bites. No big goodbye binge. Bag it up and throw it away or give it to a food bank. You will find it much easier to eat healthy food if healthy food is the only choice available to you.

Building Your Support System

Next, start using nine-inch plates and commit to eating under bright lights at your dinner table. Eating while watching television or eating at the kitchen counter leads to overeating, because we aren't as aware of the choice we're making with each forkful of food. These latter choices may not permanently alter your environment, but they involve you actively choosing what environment you eat in.

You might find it motivating to hang a note by your mirror that reminds you of your goal. Write it at a time when you are feeling exceptionally motivated so that passion shines through in your writing. Also, make sure you eliminate all work or home hazards. Make sure that your water and air are clean. Make sure your smoke detectors are working. Cover or fence all pools. Eliminate potential hazards that cause falls. Lock all doors when you are home and lock up all firearms. See [*Dr. A's Habits of Health*](#) for a comprehensive discussion on safety.

With your physical environment in order, begin to address your social environment.

If you have a health coach, talk to him or her about creating your support network. Your health coach will be able to offer you guidance and connect you with other people in your area with similar goals, and it should go without saying that your health coach is one of the first pillars in your network!

With your existing circle of friends, gently inquire to see if someone close to you is already passionate about their health or is looking to make a change. Using a buddy system can be helpful and rewarding. If no one joins you, don't be disheartened. Let them know what your goals are and ask for them to be supportive.

If you ever feel yourself losing heart and no one is available in person (and you have not yet joined our **Stop.Challenge.Choose. 12-Week Health Transformation**) you can [click here](#) and we will find you a coach to guide you!



Strengthening Your Health Bubble

Reprogramming A Bad Habit

Friends and family help us to live meaningful, fulfilling lives. Our loved ones motivate us, and they inspire us. At the same time, however, we have to recognize that the influences in our lives may not be entirely positive. If you surround yourself with negative influences, you may find it difficult to make the changes you desire and to achieve your goals. The way we interact with the people around us often comes down to habit, so let's look at an example of how we can use our personal bubble to our advantage.

Here is a common social habit:



Meeting at the Bar for Drinks



HABITS OF DISEASE LOOP

Social interaction is a basic human need. We are pack creatures, and we enjoy the company of others. However, if our routine for getting the reward of social interaction puts us in a bar, we are much more likely to make poor nutritional choices. If we change that routine, we can get the reward of social interaction while also supporting our health:



Meeting at the Park for a Walk



HABITS OF HEALTH LOOP

With this new habit, we use our desire for social interaction to simultaneously support our Habits of Motion. We still get to talk to our friends and enjoy their company, but we also get some much needed fresh air and exercise. What other habits can you restructure to strengthen your health bubble?

Love Your Life Now

Organizing Differently



Aligning Your Goals

In chapter nine, we started to talk about the success continuum as well as the fulfillment continuum, using your personal ratings as a way to begin adding more perspective to your life. We followed that chapter with a discussion on your health bubble and talked about how the environment you build and live in can affect your ability to live a potentially healthier, happier life. By now, you are probably starting to see how the areas within the trilogy of health—your body, your mind, and your finances—overlap and impact each other.

Early on in this e-book, I asked you to evaluate your life based on the trilogy, and I challenged you to set goals for yourself. As you have moved from chapter to chapter, I suspect that your goals have morphed and evolved as you learned more about health and more about yourself. That's great! It means you have begun to think more deeply about yourself and the world around you.

Aligning Your Goals

To prepare you for a lifelong journey of optimal health, we need to equip you with a goal-setting strategy that helps you better understand where you want to go and how to get there. More than that though, I am going to teach you to structure your goals in such a way that they support your overall mission of creating health.

At their most basic level, goals should be small and manageable. Having a big goal is fantastic, but if you don't break it into smaller, manageable pieces, it will seem so far away that it doesn't influence your decision-making today.

For example, your large goal might be to reach a healthy weight. To help you get there, let's make your first goal more manageable: Stick to the Habits of Health today. Tomorrow, you'll have the same goal, but you can tweak it based on what you learned the day before, perhaps making your next goal something like: "Stick to the Habits of Health today and take the stairs instead of the elevator."

Any of your goals, whether they are physical, mental, or financial, can be broken down into pieces this way. Structural tension is a powerful tool you may want to explore that provides a way to put your primary and secondary choices in order. For a more detailed discussion of using structural tension to create desired outcomes, see [*Discover Your Optimal Health*](#).

The other key to creating effective goals is to gauge your success on variables that you can control. For example, having the goal of earning a promotion is reasonable, but you can't directly control your boss' choice to promote you. You could do everything correctly and still get passed over, which will make you feel as though you failed. Instead, construct your goals around variables you can control. Rather than aiming for a promotion, your goal could be to set a new sales record or to master a new on-the-job skill. That way, the only person that can influence your success is you.



Framing Your Goals

Finding What Really Matters

Now that we have a better idea of how to set goals, let's explore what goals to set using our understanding of the way the areas of health overlap.

It may sound strange, but setting a goal for one area of your health could actually hurt your health in other areas if you do not calibrate that goal to match the bigger picture of where you want to take your life. For example, let's say that you work in a fast-paced industry. You average about 50 hours of work a week, which includes checking emails at night and jumping into late-night calls with the international team. Your boss offers you a chance to make an extra \$20,000 a year if you take on more responsibility, but that would probably mean working more on weekends.

Finding What Really Matters

You might think, “I could finally buy that new car.” And you would be right, but what would pursuing that goal cost you? Well, your mental health could suffer because of the added stress, and worse yet, you’d have even less time to spend with your family. Additionally, your physical health could degrade from your lack of rest, while your constant exhaustion keeps you from exercising.

With that perspective, is moving forward along your success continuum worth it if it pushes you backward on your fulfillment continuum? Probably not, but that could be hard to see in the moment, so we use these charts and strategies to help us maintain our big-picture context. Without these tools, it would be all too easy to go overboard on any one area. Just as I would encourage you to spend time in the gym, I would also discourage you from spending so much time in the gym that you never see your family.

Optimal health is about balance. I want you to feel empowered to find what really matters in your life so that you can live a life that you are both proud of and happy with.

Money is important but only to a point. In fact, a 2010 study conducted by Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School found that happiness stemming from financial success stops growing beyond the \$75,000 annual income mark. Making more than \$75,000 fosters feelings of success, but the study found that their day-to-day mood changed very little. At that point the additional income, in terms of well-being, actually functions to enhance your experience and memories you create with the people in your life that matter, according to Gallop Research.

The lesson here is that once your financial needs are accounted for, the rest of your happiness comes from other areas of your life. Don’t miss out on the chance to live a potentially longer, happier life by blindly chasing just one area of the trilogy.



A Routine Grounded In Well-Being Goals

Finding What Really Matters

In general, we structure our individual habits to support our larger long-term goals. If we'd like to reach a healthy weight, we reprogram our habits related to food. If we'd like to feel less stressed, we reprogram our habits for coping with stress. When it comes to habits surrounding goals, our overall objective is to develop routines that keep our big-picture at the forefront of our minds, giving us the context and desire to make the choices that lead to a balanced life.

Consider this common habit:



Drop Everything to Address it Immediately



HABITS OF DISEASE LOOP

This habit is powered by the notion that we always need to be working if we are to achieve our goals. If you have decided that your goal is actually to live a more balanced life, which could include spending more time with your family in the evenings, disappearing into your home office to respond to a work email will not give you the reward of feeling closer to your goals.



Choose to Address it Later and Focus on Family

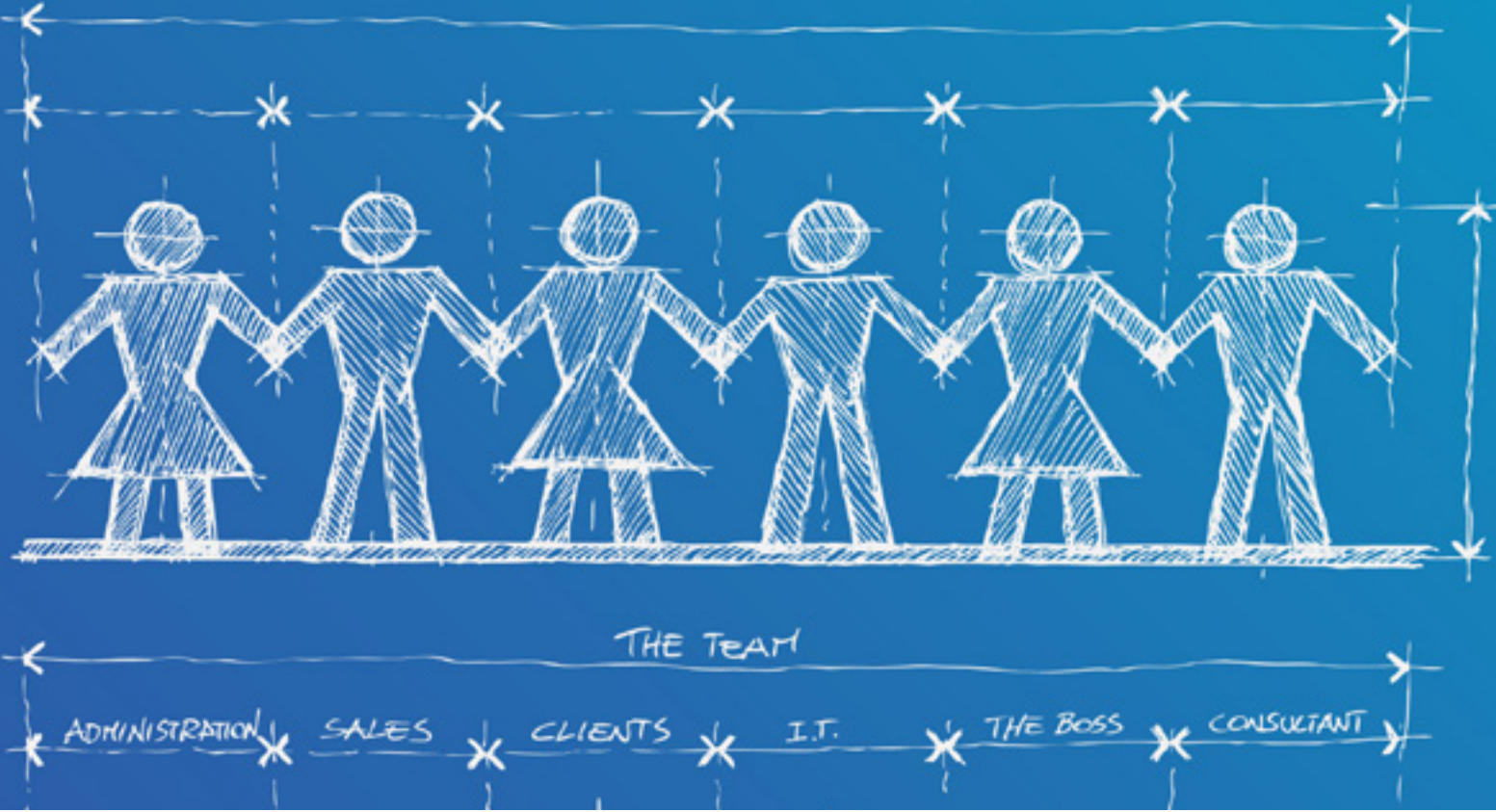


HABITS OF HEALTH LOOP

With your life aligned to new, well-rounded goals that support overall well-being, this new routine of prioritizing your evening time, giving preference to your family over work, gives you the truest satisfaction of moving toward your goals. What other habits do you have that aren't supporting your new goals?

Optimal Health Practitioner

Your New Life Plan



The New Blueprint

In just a few pages and 12 weeks, you and I have covered a remarkable amount of ground. You learned about the trilogy of optimal health. You learned a strategy for harnessing the power of habits. And you learned how to begin making positive change throughout your life to move you toward your optimal health goals.

You now have a new blueprint for your life, one that is custom-tailored to your needs and aspirations.

The New Blueprint

You are embarking upon a new lifestyle. You are taking up the responsibility of becoming an Optimal Health Practitioner and joining a vibrant community of people just like you. Optimal Health Practitioner is not necessarily a career—though it could be, if you'd like—it's a way of thinking of yourself. If you label yourself an Optimal Health Practitioner and think of your life within that frame, it will help to reinforce the habits and behaviors that keep you on the path of health. You are taking your newfound ability to see the world differently and applying it to yourself.

In one glance, you can see the you now, the you that you aspire to become, and all of the manifestations of you that will come and go as you progress toward your ideal. And that ideal is Optimal Health Practitioner.

If you've made an effort to put the knowledge in this e-book into practice, you are already part of our community, and we welcome you.

To help keep you on track, let's first look back over the progress you've made:

- In the early chapters, you learned how to **Stop.Challenge.Choose.** to evaluate your choices and to make health a priority.
- You learned about a new path to take and how that path can lead to a potentially longer, healthier life.
- We talked about the challenge of making healthy choices in our candy shop of a society.
- We covered some no-nonsense advice on fueling your body and fighting cravings.
- You started to incorporate motion into your life to beat the deskbound lifestyle.
- You became friends with your bed again by learning the Habits of Healthy Sleep.

The New Blueprint

- We began to lay the groundwork for your very own protective health bubble.
- We zoomed out to talk about your big life goals and what really makes you happy, asking the tough questions about what choices will really guide your life in the direction you desire.

These principles will serve you well throughout the rest of your life. They can propel your life in a rich, new direction—if you are compelled to work on them every day.



Becoming A Health Coach

From Student To Teacher (Guide)

If you want to really understand the depth of a topic, teach it. Health is no different.

This is common wisdom amongst teachers, and for good reason. When you have to teach something, it forces your mind to reorganize what you think you know about it. We might be naturally adept at throwing a football, but to transfer that knowledge to someone else requires a more detailed perspective. You have to evaluate what you do and how you do it and then articulate the process to someone else.

In the end, you learn more, too.

The New Blueprint

Also, if you recall our discussion about the importance of having a support network to hold you accountable, your role in your health community will push you forward as well. When you put yourself in the role of teacher, you become a mentor, a standard to which your students aspire.

When you become a health coach, your main focus is to guide people through the system which frees the coach up to focus on building the relationship with others who desire to become healthier. You not only get the rich reward of helping others, you also help yourself by focusing on health. Our coaches are having fun, and they love being part of a vibrant group of people who are helping others improve their lives. At the same time, you can also improve your financial health, bettering each area of the health trilogy with a singular career. It's a fulfilling and life-changing path to take, and I highly recommend it to anyone who has a passion for helping others.

At the same time, though, you don't need to be a formal health coach to be a true Optimal Health Practitioner. If you make yourself available to answer questions, if you offer support to those who may stumble, and if you commit to being a champion of health for your family and friends, you too can make a difference in someone's life. You may not have made being a health coach your career, but you are no less important.

Every contribution matters, big and small. That means your contribution matters, too.

Whether you're interested in learning more about creating Optimal Health as a practitioner, or becoming a health coach, or simply want to be a part of the Optimal Health community, you can learn even more about creating health in your life by joining the Stop.Challenge.Choose.™ 12-Week Health Transformation - a free daily email program and a personal Health Coach to help you improve your health.

Visit <http://StopChallengeChoose.com> right now to learn more.

Remember, we're here to help. And we're happy to have you with us on this journey.

The Journey Has Just Begun

When I set out to write this e-book, I wanted to find a new way to make health accessible. I wanted to awaken people to the potential within them and guide them through a proven transformation process. I believe that everyone deserves to have a life full of adventure. I believe that everyone deserves the chance to be happy and to thrive. Health should not feel out of reach. Health should not feel like a distant, unachievable dream.

Health is right here. You can reach out and make it yours. I sincerely believe that, and I hope that after 12 chapters of reading that you believe it, too. But even in the beginning, if you do not believe just yet, do it anyway! Your success will give you the confidence to keep going.

I have seen it happen to tens of thousands of people who had little confidence at first. Just start! From here, you can take the principles that we've covered briefly and explore them in greater depth. You can learn more about the food you eat. You can explore new Habits of Motion. You can better understand the way your mind and your finances connect to your health and influence your overall happiness. I've dedicated my life to helping people transform their lives, and this e-book is just one tool to facilitate that change.

You would likely enjoy [*Discover Your Optimal Health*](#), a New York Times Bestseller that helps to further awaken the desire that's carried you this far. [*Dr. A's Habits of Health*](#) and the companion guide, [*Living a Longer, Healthier Life*](#), are down-to-earth, practical systems for every facet of your health, from nutrition to exercise to mental health. You will need this greater knowledge to continue advancing toward Optimal Health, and I think you'll find these books easy to read and use.

If you haven't already, connect with the person who sent you this e-book or connect with a Take Shape For Life health coach (via <http://.stopchallengechoose.com>). They can give you the structure and knowledge that you need to take what you've started here and nurture it into a lifestyle that stands the test of time.



The Journey Has Just Begun

Wherever you choose to go from here, my main concern is that you continue toward Optimal Health.

Whether you read my books now or later, whether you get a Health Coach now or later, my biggest desire is that you feel better about yourself now than when you first started. I hope that you feel empowered to build the life that you dream of, and I hope that you continue building the momentum that you've worked so hard to create.

You can do it. You're already on the path. Build the life of your dreams.

Myself and the rest of the Optimal Health community are here to help.

In health,