

Welcome to
G.R.O.W.

Growth, **R**esources and
Opportunities for **W**omen

The Thoughtful 30: 30 Day Reset for Midlife

Thursday, April 9, 2026

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Mark Your Calendars!

Our next G.R.O.W. Special Interest Group Happy Hour:

Thursday, May 7, 2026
At Mesero!



Speaker



Meridan Zerner

Meridan Zerner Nutrition
Founder – Dietitian Nutritionist

The Thoughtful 30: 30-Day Reset for Midlife and Beyond

Inspiring change and enhancing brain health...

30 days at a time!

Presented by Meridan Zerner, MS, RDN, CSSD, LD, CHWC

Objectives

- Appreciate a holistic “Science Meets Self-Care” structured way to layer small, but powerful, “30-themed” health habits so you can function at your best
- Learn the synergistic relationship between sleep, stress and metabolic health
- Describe the role of hydration and protein in cognitive function, metabolism and appetite regulation
- Explore the critical role of fiber and gut health to overall health
- Identify lifestyle factors such as mindful movement, the MIND diet and supportive supplementation that influence mind-body health
- Develop YOUR personalized health strategy using 30 days at a time, the 10 Power Pillars and a new “refresh + reset” attitude

A “1-Thing”

- Tackle your habits one at a time
- Research shows that when people use this “1” strategy, the likelihood for retention is higher
- Trying to change multiple behaviors at once decreases the chance of success to 5 - 35%
- Fewer than 20–30% of people maintain change beyond a year *without structured support*

Mindset Shift

(+ A Road Map to Get You There...)

- From: “What is the matter with you?” and “I know what I’m *supposed* to be doing...”
- To: “What matters to you?” and “What is possible?”

Why “The Thoughtful 30”?

- Structure/scaffolding/support
- Science
- Simplicity
- And a holistic multifactorial approach to health...
 - Holistic health recognizes the whole person: physical, mental, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual. Most of these approaches are used *in combination* and *with* conventional medicine to provide a unique recipe for wellbeing





***Most people just focus on the leaves....
But real change happens at the root level.***

30-Themed, 30 Days, 10 Power Pillars

- 30 days...and then reassess!
- 30 minutes of movement (X 2)
- 30 grams of protein (3 X per day...men need more)
- 30 grams of fiber
- 30 ounces of water (X 3...men need more)
- 30 more minutes of sleep
- 30 second gratitude practice

GOAL: Progress, not perfection

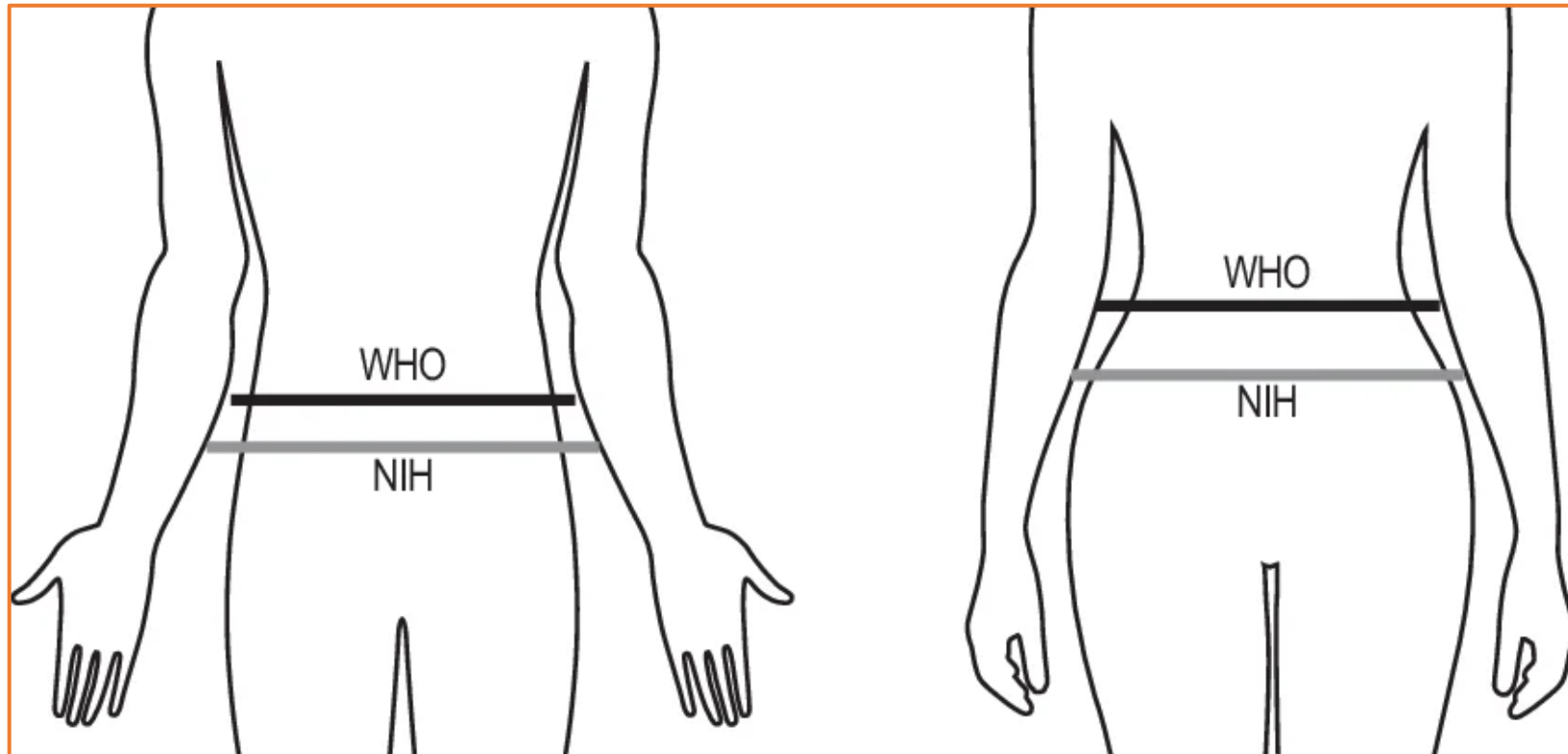
Let's Plant the Seeds of Change...

Top 10 Power Pillars

- 1. Know YOUR numbers –
 - Get your annual physical to get a baseline
 - Identify key markers that matter
 - Forward think any genetic predisposition
 - Choose to use simple tools to track your progress:
 - Body composition; **measurements**; how you feel in your clothes, scale (my least favorite)
 - **RMR** – resting metabolic rate

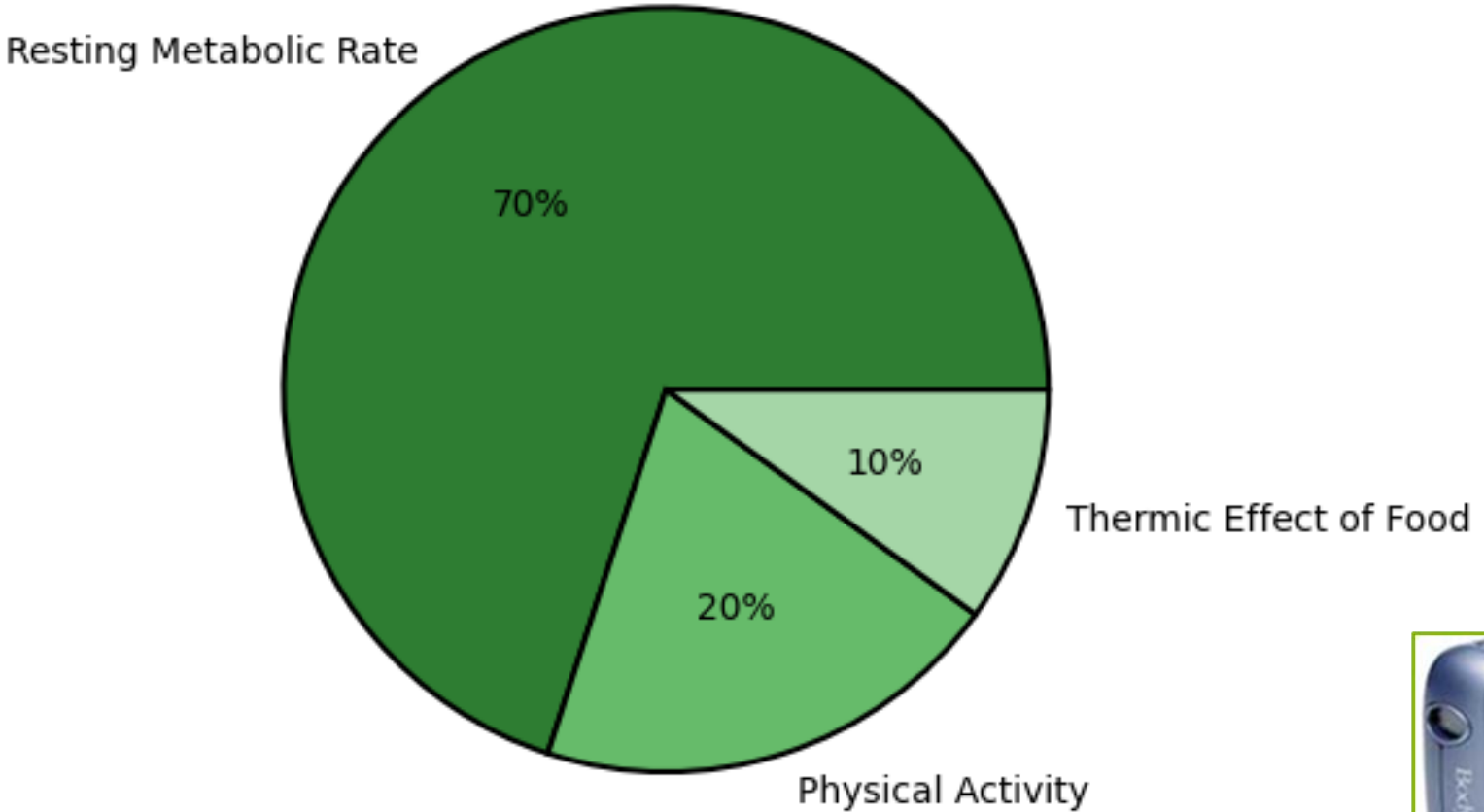
Measure. Move Forward.

NIH Recs:
Women < 35"
Men < 40"



WHO Recs:
Women < 31.5"
Men < 37"

Total Daily Energy Expenditure



Top 10 Power Pillars

2. Start with the sun

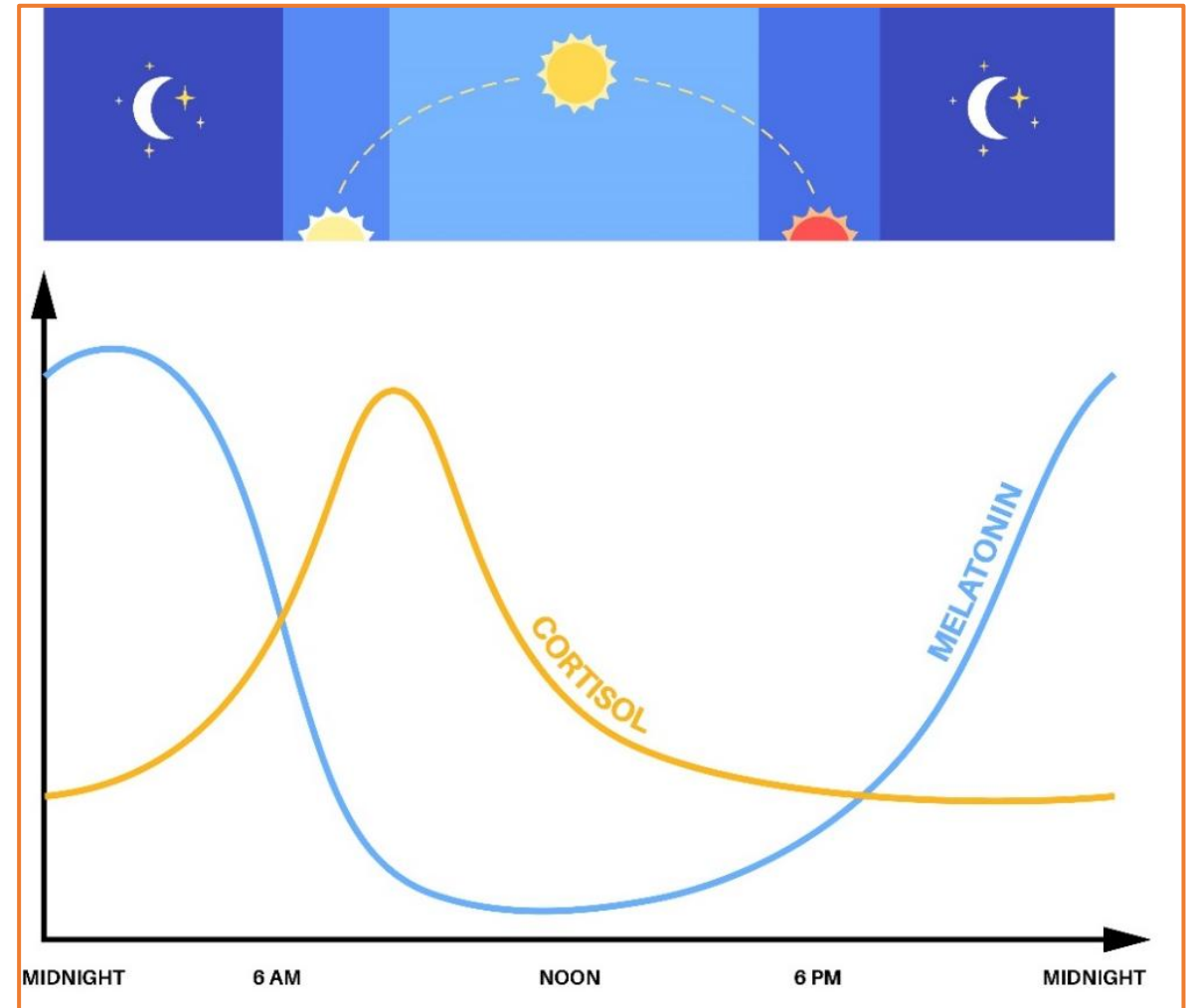
Morning light anchors your circadian rhythm, **regulates cortisol**, normalizes melatonin production, signals your brain to wake, focus, and regulate hormones

Get 5–15 minutes of morning light



Cortisol

- Normally, cortisol is released in close relation with your body's *circadian rhythm*
 - 50–60% released within 30–40 minutes of waking
 - Levels fall throughout the day



Cortisol + Weight Gain

- Elevated cortisol stimulates the release of extra insulin, which can cause blood sugar to drop quickly
- To bring blood sugar back up, the body craves carbohydrate foods
- When stress and cortisol remain chronically high, insulin must also strive to create hormonal balance and the cravings multiply
- Over time, using sugary foods to balance blood sugar can lead to insulin resistance and weight gain
- NOTE: Cortisol itself does not trigger weight gain, the consequences of prolonged cortisol levels and the effects on insulin/blood sugar **lead to increased weight**

Top 10 Power Pillars

3. H2O to GO! 30oz X 3

- **Brain is ~75–80% water**
 - Even 1–2% dehydration = ↓ focus, slower processing
 - Often mistaken for fatigue = reach for water, not food or more caffeine
-
- **Performance Impact**
 - Supports memory, attention, and clarity
 - May support long-term brain health
 - Improved digestion
-
- **Daily Targets (starting point)**
 - Women: ~9 cups (72 oz)
 - Men: ~13 cups (104 oz)
 - ~20% from food



Sip Your Way to B.R.A.I.N. F.I.R.S.T.

- 2-3 cups coffee/day or 1-2 cups tea/day (green tea pref.) associated with the lowest dementia risk
- Moderate intake linked to reduced cognitive decline and improved performance



B.R.A.I.N. F.I.R.S.T.



Lifestyle Choices/Early Intervention =

Key to Preventing Cognitive Decline

- The Spring 2025 Alzheimer's Association Research Roundtable brought together leaders from academia, medical practice, industry, and government to look at the latest innovations in Alzheimer's disease
- During the meeting, participants examined:
 - The latest in early detection and diagnosis biomarkers
 - Ways for health systems to get ready to diagnose and treat very early-stage Alzheimer's safely, effectively, and equitably
 - The effectiveness of early-stage treatment interventions
 - **The clinical importance of scaling up early intervention strategies**

Lifestyle Roadmap to Cognitive Health

Modifiable Risk Factors

- B blood sugar balance
- R real food
- A activity
- I inflammation control
- N neural engagement
- **F fiber/gut health**
- I interpersonal connection
- R restorative sleep
- S stress regulation
- T tobacco & toxins

Fiber & Gut Health

What % of Americans don't get enough fiber?

A) About 40%

B) About 60%

C) About 80%

D) Over 90%

Top 10 Power Pillars

4. Fiber Is Your Friend

Men	Women
\leq 50 years old = 38 grams	\leq 50 years old = 25 grams
$>$ 50 years old = 30 grams	$>$ 50 years old = 21 grams

30 grams per day, 30 plants per week

30 Plants/Week Checklist

FRUITS

- Apple
- Apricot
- Avocado
- Banana
- Blackberries
- Blueberries
- Cantaloupe
- Cherries
- Clementines
- Cranberries
- Dates
- Figs
- Grapefruit
- Grapes/raisins
- Kiwi
- Lemon
- Lime
- Mango
- Nectarine
- Orange
- Olives
- Papaya
- Peach
- Pear
- Pineapple
- Plantain
- Plum/prunes
- Pomegranate
- Raspberries
- Strawberries
- Watermelon

VEGGIES

- Artichoke
- Arugula
- Asparagus
- Beets
- Bok choy
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Collard greens
- Cucumber
- Eggplant
- Fennel
- Green beans
- Jicama
- Kale
- Lettuce
- Mushrooms
- Onions
- Parsnips
- Peppers
- Pumpkin
- Radishes
- Spinach
- Squash
- Sweet potato
- Swiss chard
- Tomatoes
- Turnips
- Watercress
- White potato
- Zucchini

BEANS

- Black
- Butter beans
- Cannellini
- Fava
- Garbanzo
- Kidney
- Lentils
- Lima
- Lupini
- Navy
- Peas
- Pinto
- Soybeans

GRAINS

- Amaranth
- Barley
- Brown rice
- Buckwheat
- Corn/popcorn
- Kamut
- Millet
- Oats
- Quinoa
- Rye
- Sorghum
- Spelt
- Teff
- Whole wheat
- Wild rice

HERBS/SPICES

- Basil
- Cayenne
- Chives
- Cinnamon
- Cocoa
- Cumin
- Dill
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Matcha
- Mint
- Nutmeg
- Oregano
- Parsley
- Pepper
- Turmeric

NUTS/SEEDS

- Almonds
- Brazil nuts
- Cashews
- Chia
- Coconut
- Flax
- Hazelnuts
- Hemp
- Macadamia
- Peanuts
- Pecans
- Pili nuts
- Pine nuts
- Pistachios
- Pumpkin
- Sesame
- Sunflower
- Walnuts

[LEARN MORE](#)

5. Mindful Movement

- Regular physical activity can help you sleep and feel better, reduce the risk of some cancers
- Physical activity can help you think, learn, problem-solve, improve memory and reduce anxiety/depression
- Regular physical activity can reduce your risk of cognitive decline, including dementia
 - Studies show cognitive decline is almost twice as common among adults who are inactive vs. those who are active



Mindful Movement continued

1. Aerobic Activity (Cardio)

- 150–300 minutes/week of moderate intensity
OR
75–150 minutes/week of vigorous intensity

2. Strength Training

- At least 2 days per week

3. **Balance & Mobility (wait for #26 of 30!)**

- 2–3 days per week (especially important with age)

Mindful Movement

The Thoughtful 30 Recommendation

- **Work up to...**30 minutes of movement *TWICE a day*
- **Morning / Earlier Movement:**
 - Improves insulin sensitivity for the next several hours
 - Helps muscles become more efficient at glucose uptake
 - Sets the metabolic tone for the day
- **Evening / Post-Dinner Movement:**
 - Directly manages the **hardest time of day for blood sugar/highest-risk glucose window**
 - Prevents prolonged elevations overnight
 - Supports better sleep + recovery
 - Prevents excess storage overnight

Your evening habits are writing your metabolic future.

6. Go PRO!

Consume 30 g protein X 3

Fuel

- The brain runs on glucose
 - Refined vs Quality carbs
- What's the brain's minimum glucose need?
~100–130 grams of glucose/day

Pair

- For better blood sugar balance, **pair carbs with protein** or healthy fat (the buddy system)

Refuel

- Women – 3 ounces or 25-30 grams, 3 times per day
- Men – 5 ounces or 40 grams, 3-4 times per day
- Needs vary
- **Do the math –**
 - **.55g/lb to .73g/lb**

Got Protein?

- Cottage cheese = ½ cup = 12g
- Hard boiled egg = 1 Egg = 6g
- Chicken breast = 3 ounces = 25g
- Protein shake - 1 scoop of protein = 20g
- Greek yogurt - 1 cup = 15g
- Almonds ¼ cup = 5g
- Pumpkin seeds ¼ cup = 10g
- Black beans ½ cup = 8g
- Hummus 2 Tbs = 2g
- No nitrite turkey jerky = 1 oz serving = 14g
- Edamame 1 cup = 17g

Top 10 Power Pillars

7. Redefine Happy Hour

Short-term Benefits:

Improved sleep quality
better mood,
increased energy
enhanced concentration and improved
memory
Weight management
Enhanced hydration and skin health

Long-term benefits

Cardiovascular improvements:
Reduced disease risk
Metabolic benefits
Enhanced brain function



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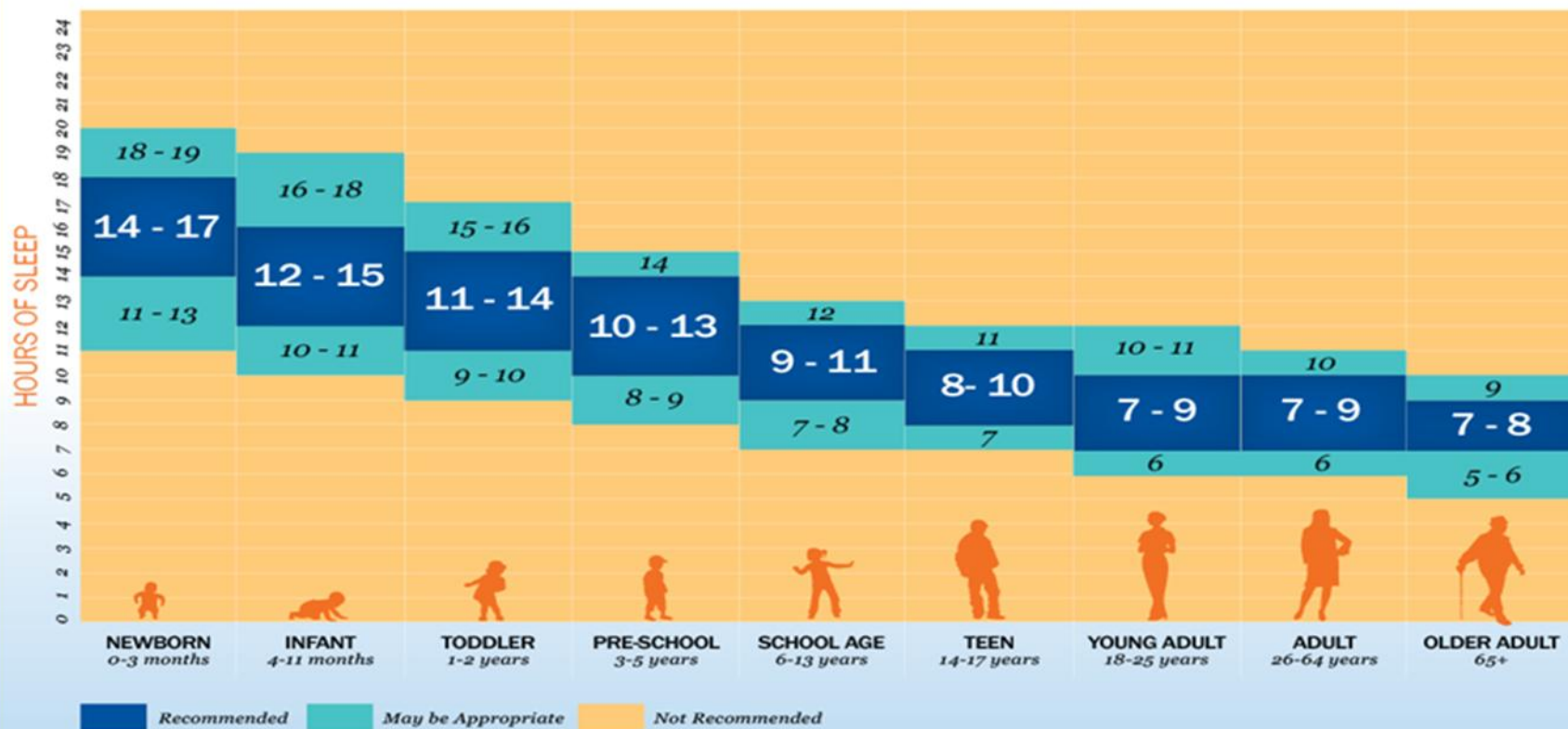
"I'm the Apnea Fairy. I have orders to give you a wake up call at 10:30, 10:47, 10:53, 11:02, 11:17, 11:26..."

8. Invest In Rest

- Strive to get 30 more minutes of sleep for better health
- Studies show that too little sleep or interrupted can have a negative effect on:
 - HEALTH! Insufficient sleep is linked to:
 - Weight gain, appetite dysregulation, depression, ADHD, obesity, Type II diabetes, heart disease, increased stroke risk, cancer and Alzheimer's disease
- Attention/Safety
- Concentration and focus...(Oh Look! A butterfly!)
- The CDC has labeled sleep deprivation a **public health epidemic**



SLEEP DURATION RECOMMENDATIONS



SLEEPFOUNDATION.ORG | SLEEP.ORG

Hirshkowitz M, The National Sleep Foundation's sleep time duration recommendations: methodology and results summary, Sleep Health (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sleh.2014.12.010>

Sleep Strategies

Sleep starts long before your head hits the pillow...



- CBT therapy
- Limit alcohol
- Avoid or cut down on caffeine
- 65–67-degree bedroom
- Try “white noise” or ear plugs
- If you nap, keep it to less than 30 minutes
- Front load your liquids
- Supplements*:
 - Magnesium
 - L-theanine
 - Tart cherry
 - 5-HTP
 - Tryptophan
 - Melatonin

9. Supportive Supplementation

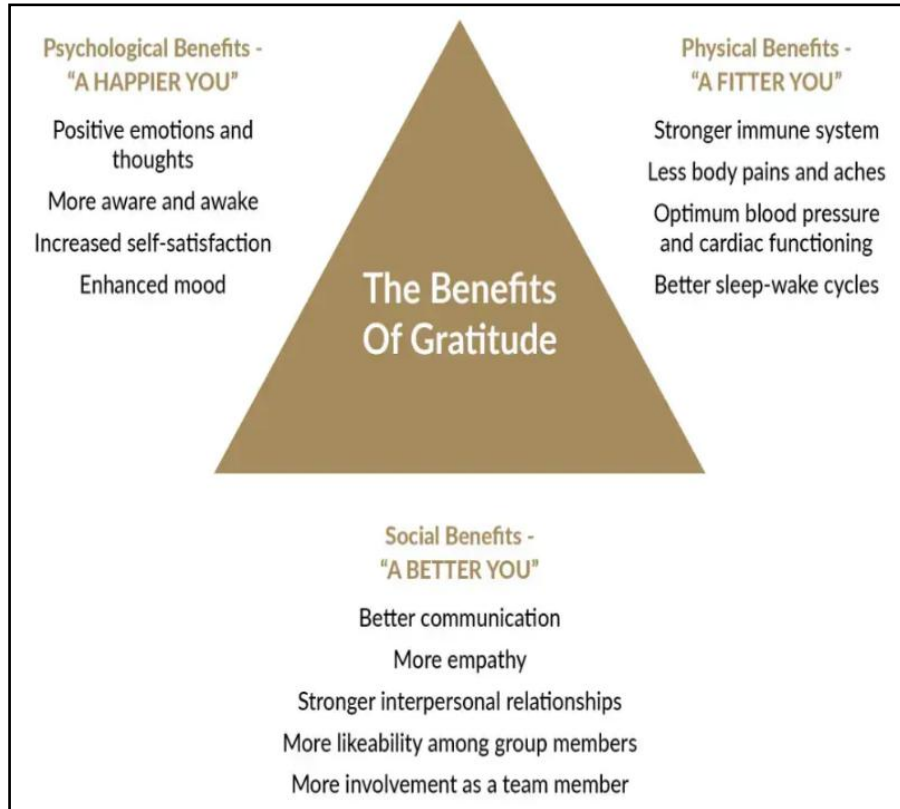
*check with your MD

- Multivitamin (age and gender specific)
- Vitamin D (1000mg – 2000mg)
- Omega 3 (1000mg – 2000mg EPA + DHA)

- Collagen peptides
- Creatine
- Calcium
- Magnesium
- Polyphenols
- Probiotics

10. Attitude of Gratitude

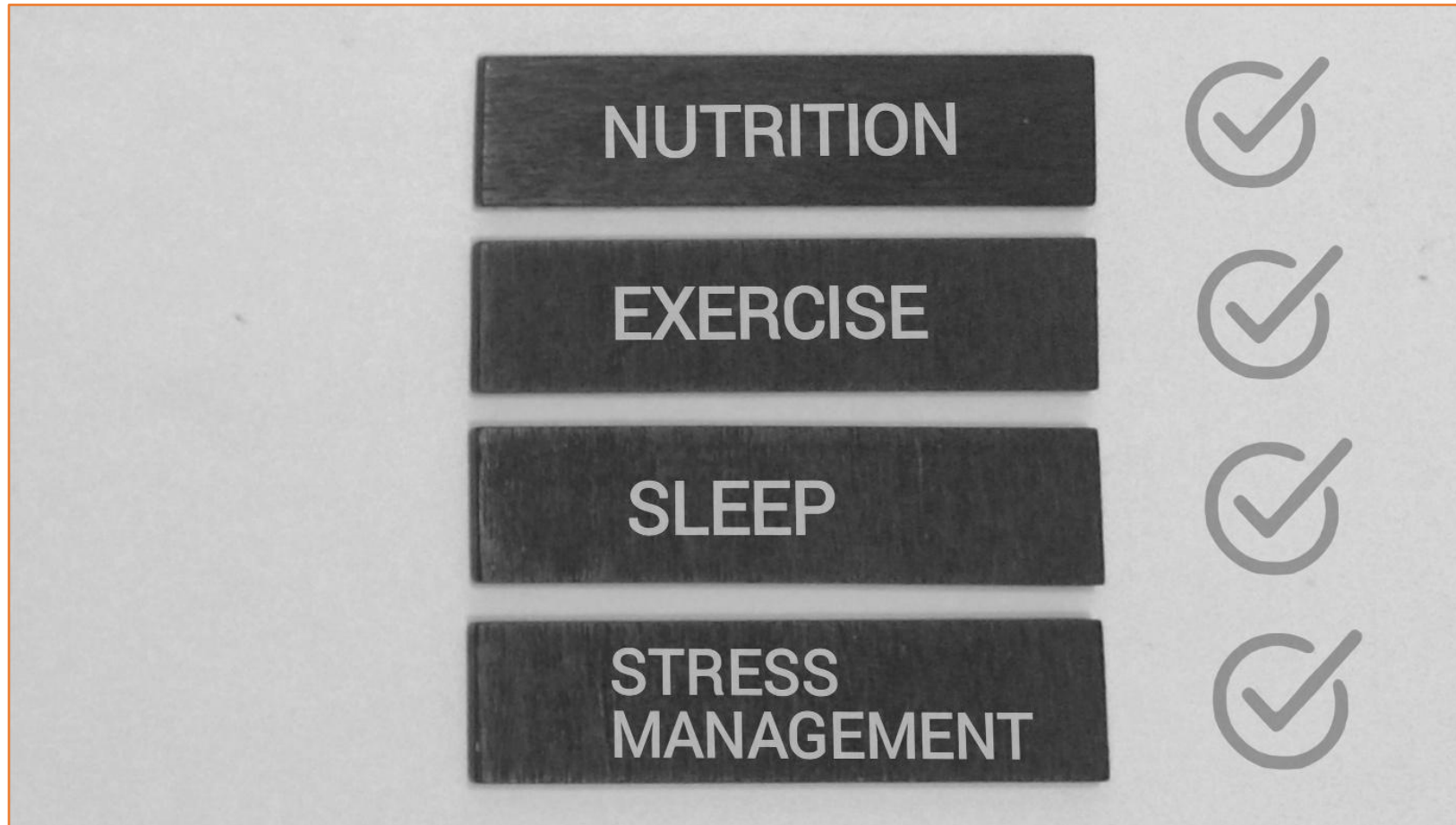
Cultivate a 30-second Gratitude Practice



Source: UC Berkley Greater Good Science Center, positivepsychology.com

- Practicing gratitude allows our brains to release serotonin and dopamine - two “feel good” chemicals that positively impact mood and motivation
- Over time, practicing gratitude “trains” your brain to focus on **what’s going well** vs. what isn’t, which leads to positive health outcomes
- One study of nurses found gratitude consistently predicted less exhaustion, fewer sick days and higher job satisfaction

Top 10 Pillars Complete! Stretch Break!



11. Do Your Calorie Math

12. Consider A Dietary Tracking Tool

- Mifflin St. Jeor equation
- **Women:**
 - $\text{RMR} = (4.54 \times \text{weight in lbs}) + (15.88 \times \text{height in inches}) - (5 \times \text{age}) - 161$
- **Men:**
 - $\text{RMR} = (4.54 \times \text{weight in lbs}) + (15.88 \times \text{height in inches}) - (5 \times \text{age}) + 5$
- **Multiply by an activity factor:**
 - Sedentary (little/no exercise): $\times 1.2$
 - Lightly active (1–3 days/week): $\times 1.375$
 - Moderately active (3–5 days/week): $\times 1.55$
 - Very active (6–7 days/week): $\times 1.725$



13. Dial Down Sugar

- **Excess added sugar** especially from sugar-sweetened beverages contributes to chronic low-grade **inflammation**, which can make cognitive health harder to protect over time
- More recent studies continue to link higher sugar intake with higher inflammatory markers such as **high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP)**
- Researchers suggest that sugar stimulates the production of free fatty acids in the liver and after digestion, the resulting compounds can trigger inflammatory processes
- Excess sugar can result in excess calories contributing to obesity which is another cause of **inflammation**



14. Keep It Whole

Real Food/Less Ultra Processed Food

Daily:

- 1 cup leafy greens; ½-1 cup vegetables
- ½-1 cup berries
- 3-5 oz fatty fish 2-3X/wk (or Omega 3 supplement)
 - DHA + EPA = 1000 – 2000mg
- ½ cup beans/legumes
- 1 oz nuts
- 1-2 Tablespoons of olive oil

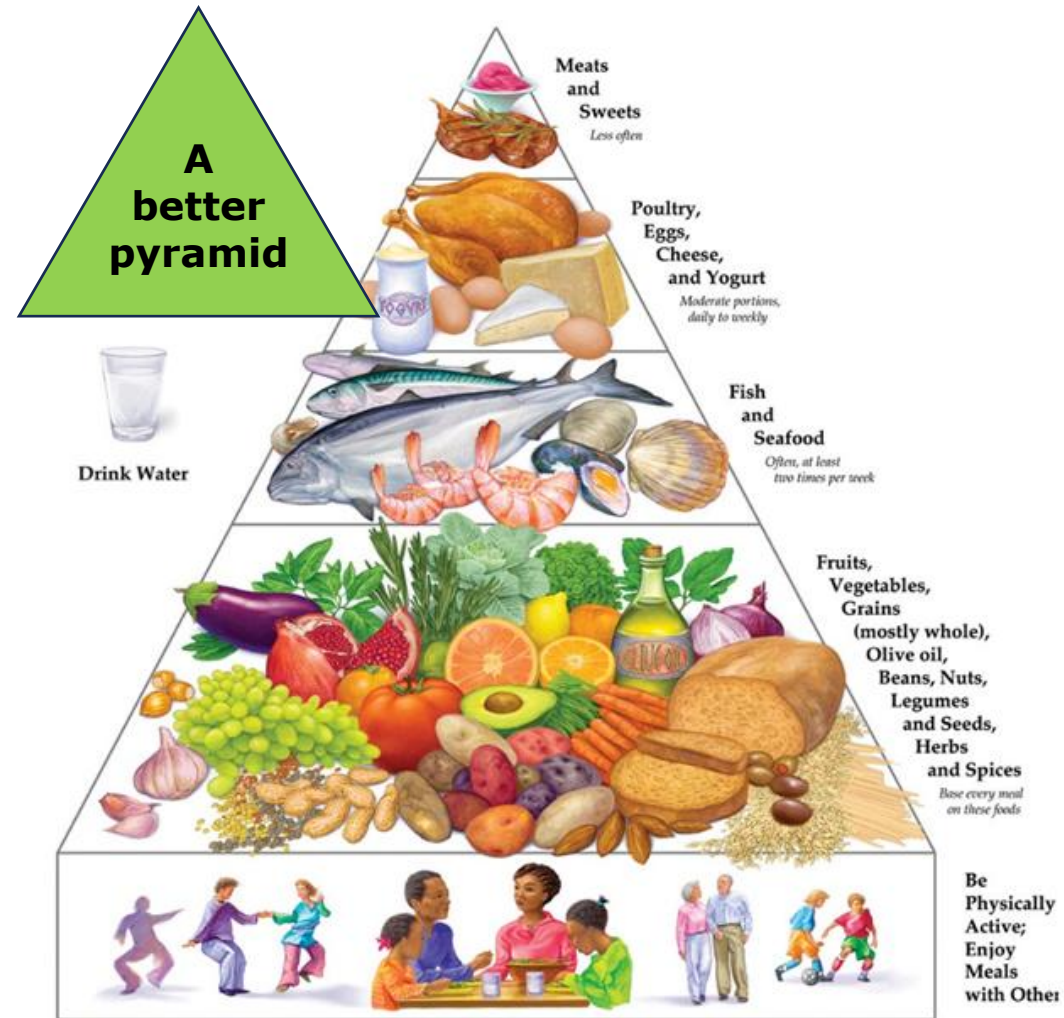
15. Add 1 T Olive Oil Daily

Virgin vs. Refined Olive Oil

PREDIMED-Plus Project

- At the study's conclusion, researchers found that participants who consumed **virgin olive oil** rather than refined olive oil showed improved cognitive function and greater diversity in their gut microbiota
- Cold pressed “Extra virgin” or “virgin” on the label, often identified as imported from Italy, Spain, etc.
- Dark glass bottles or tins (protects oil from light)
- Harvest date or production date when available
- Single-origin or regionally labeled oils

16. Customize Your Diet: M.I.N.D./Medi Diet



17. Front Load Your Fuel

18. Go Light At Night

- “Chrono-nutrition”

- Research on eating timing patterns shows that a greater proportion of daily caloric intake consumed in the evening is associated with greater odds of cardiometabolic diseases such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and obesity
- The primary mechanism linking the timing of eating and other behavioral factors to CVD risk is **circadian misalignment**, which refers to a mismatch between lifestyle innate circadian rhythms, leading to a state of metabolic dysfunction characterized by glycemic dysregulation, higher blood pressure and greater risk for weight gain

19. Prep Today = Power Tomorrow

Block planning – Insert here: Protein + fiber-rich vegetables + quality carb

Purchase

Rotisserie chicken

Frozen shrimp/fish

Frozen fruits/veggies

Microwaveable grains (rice, quinoa)

Pre-washed greens

Pre-cut veggies

Plan/Prep

Grill/bake chicken, salmon, or turkey

Hard boil eggs

Cook ground meat once → use all week

Cut veggies when you get home

Store in clear containers (visibility matters)

20. Create Default Health

(make the healthy choice the easy choice)

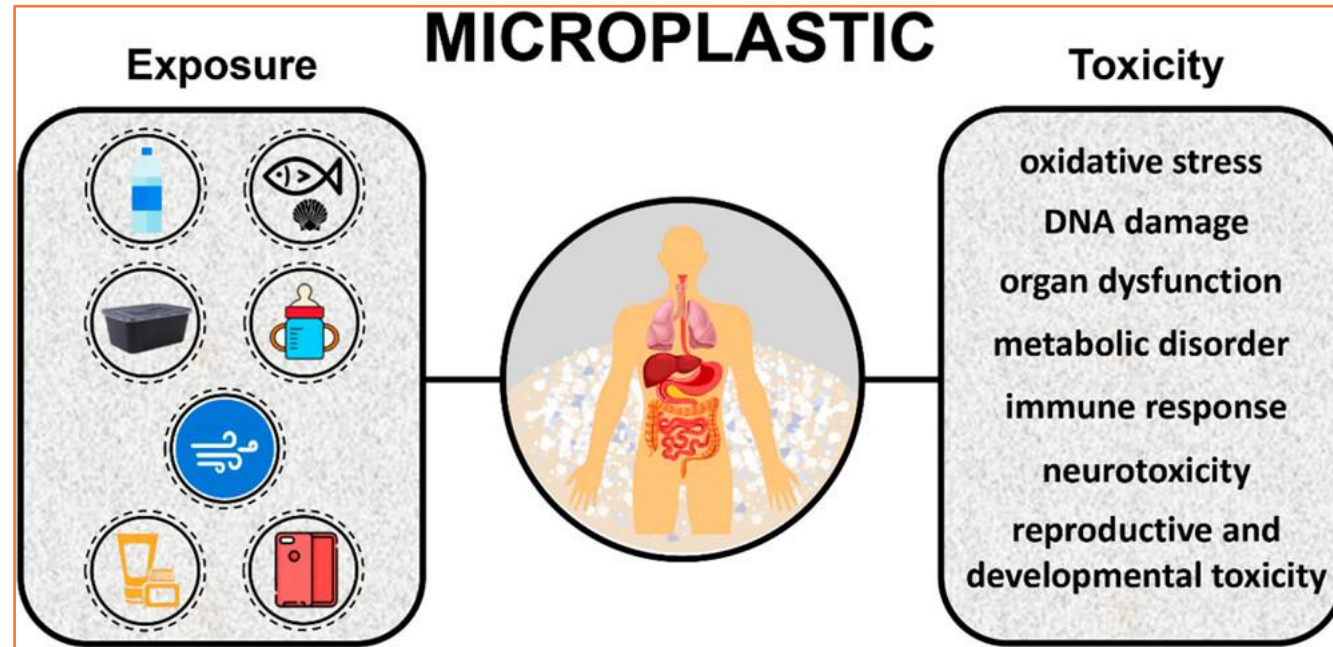
- **1. Make healthy foods the most visible option**
 - Fruit bowl on the counter
 - Pre-cut veggies in clear containers at eye level
 - Keep water front-and-center in the fridge
- **2. Create a “grab-and-go” healthy zone**
 - Pantry or fridge section for nuts, yogurt, cut fruit, hummus
 - Use clear containers so nothing gets forgotten
- **3. Reduce temptation without relying on willpower**
 - Move less healthy foods out of sight or harder-to-reach areas
 - Store treats in opaque containers (and strive not to bring your dietary “achilles heel” home regularly)
- **4. Use your environment to guide portions**
 - Pre-portion snacks into small containers
 - Keep a few portion-friendly dishes or bowls
 - Consider a food scale as a tool, a visual and for awareness (not obsession)

21. Eat With Intention - Mindful Eating Skills

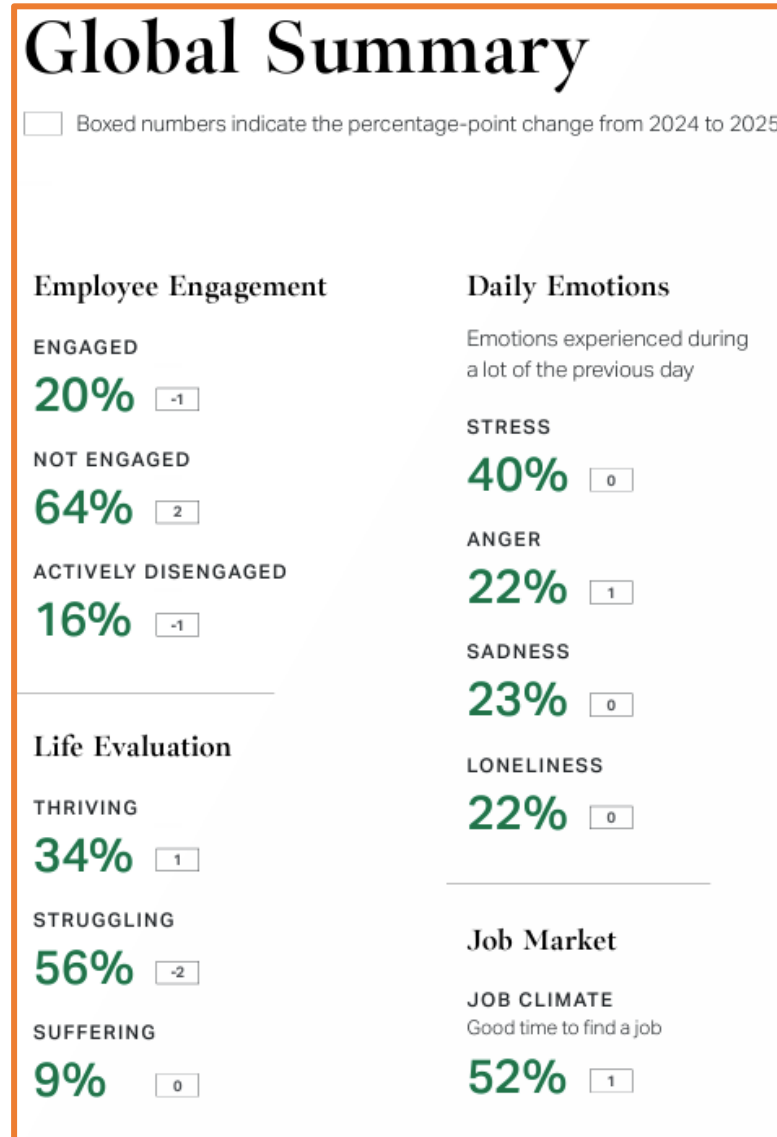
1. Pause before you eat
2. Eat without distraction
3. Slow the pace - Put the fork down between bites; Chew slowly and thoroughly; Sip water
4. Engage your senses - notice taste, texture, aroma, temperature
5. Learn (or relearn) your hunger & fullness cues
6. Check in mid-meal
7. Remove judgment - No “good” or “bad” foods
8. Sit down & create a calm meal environment

22. Minimize Microplastics

Recent research indicates “concern” regarding the effects of microplastic exposure in our bodies...



23. Connection



Social Connection = Better Health

The physical health consequences of poor or insufficient connection include a:

29% increased risk of heart disease

32% increased risk of stroke

50% increased risk of developing dementia

*Lacking social connection
increases risk of premature death
by more than 60%.*

24. Give Back

Small, Intentional Acts of Kindness

- From a physiological standpoint, kindness is one of the simplest ways to support your nervous system...
- When you engage in acts of kindness:
 - Oxytocin increases (connection and trust)
 - Cortisol decreases (stress)
 - Heart rate and blood pressure decreases
 - Your body shifts into a **parasympathetic state** - the mode where healing, digestion, and restoration occur
- Give a genuine compliment
- Send a thoughtful text
- Call or check in on someone
- Buy coffee for someone
- Hold the door or offer help
- Let someone go ahead in line
- Smile and make eye contact
- Write a thank-you note
- Bring or share food
- Walk with a friend or neighbor
- Give a small gift or flowers
- Donate items you don't need
- Volunteer your time
- Be fully present in conversation

25. Digital Detox

Reduce “the screen suck” aka social media =

Better Sleep + Mental Health

A 1-week social media detox reduced:

- Anxiety by 16%
- Depression by 25%
- Insomnia by 14%

Even **one week** off social media measurably improves sleep and mental health.

JAMA Netw Open
Published Online: November 24, 2025
2025;8;(11):e2545245.



26. Balance Challenge Daily

- According to the American Heart Association, the inability to balance on one leg for longer than 20-30 seconds was associated with:
 - Reduced cognitive function
 - Cerebral small vessel disease, namely small infarctions without symptoms
- Let's go! **Stand up!**



What's Your Actual Balance-Based Age?

Balance Time	Actual Balance-Based Age
4 seconds	70 years
5 seconds	65 years
7 seconds	60 years
8 seconds	55 years
9 seconds	50 years
12 seconds	45 years
16 seconds	40 years
22 seconds	30-35 years
28 seconds	25-30 years

27. Brain Boost aka Neural Engagement

- Challenge your brain regularly for 30 seconds or 30 minutes:
 - Learn new skills or languages
 - Read books
 - Seek novelty
 - Play games
 - Travel
 - Create art
 - Commit to a mindfulness/meditation practice

28. 3 Deep Breaths - Pause To Practice



29. Acknowledge Your Efforts Gift To Self

Over time, those small acknowledgments create momentum, confidence, and a sense of trust in yourself. And that trust is what makes healthy habits stick.

Acknowledge it. Reinforce it. Repeat it.

- New socks (love!)
- A new journal
- Scented candles (lavender, eucalyptus, vanilla)
- Shower steamers or bath salts
- Aromatherapy oils
- Fancy herbal teas
- Movie or event tickets
- Affirmation/pivot year book

Every healthy choice is a vote for the person you're becoming.

30. After 30 Days...

- Reassess
- Reassess
- Reassess
- Refine
- Let go of what isn't serving you
- Ask for help
- Reset
- **Begin again...**



A healthy life isn't always about adding more – it can also be about removing what no longer serves you.

Ready for The Thoughtful 30?
What's Your "1-Thing"?



Thank You For Your Time!

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Modifiable Risk Factors

Early Life

- Low education

Midlife

- Hearing loss
- **High LDL cholesterol ***
- Depression
- Traumatic brain injury
- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Obesity

Late Life

- Social isolation
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Air pollution
- Untreated vision loss

Beyond Cholesterol: Lp(a) Impacts Heart and Brain Health

- One of the newer cholesterol guidelines now recommends that **Lp(a)** – lipoprotein a - be checked at least once in adulthood
- Lp(a) is a type of cholesterol that is largely **determined by genetics**
- Because of that:
 - *Diet, exercise, and weight loss don't significantly change Lp(a) levels*
 - *Understanding your baseline risk helps guide how aggressively we manage other risk factors*

Food First

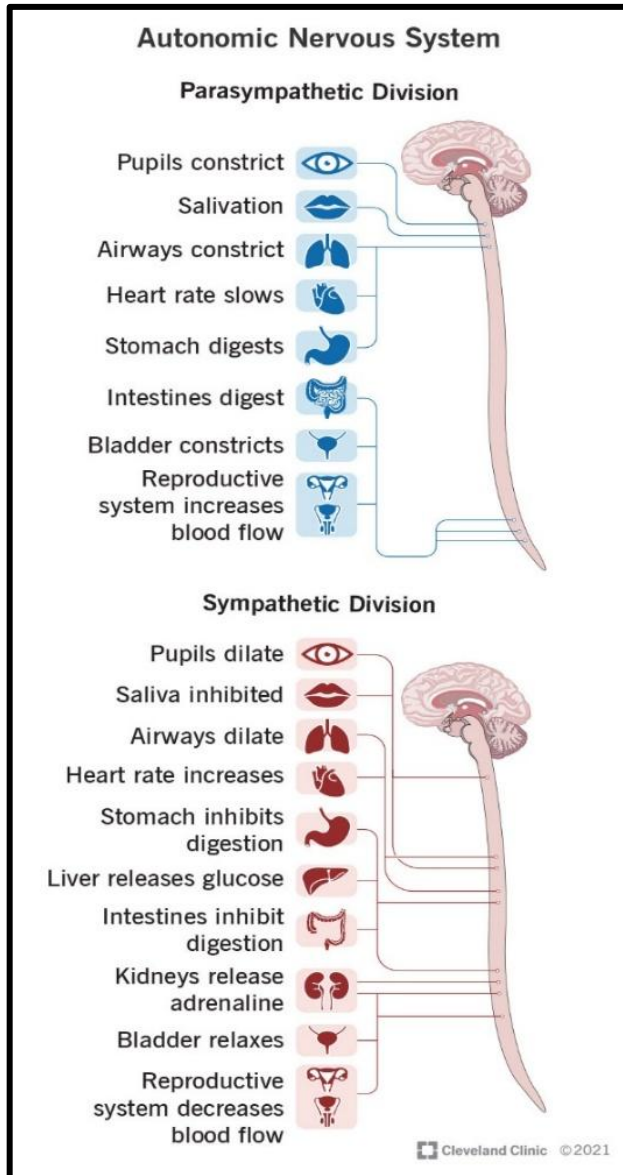
- Yogurt and kefir (milk or non-dairy based, such as soy, coconut and water)
- Sauerkraut, kimchi, pickles
- Miso, tamari (soy)
- Tempeh (soy)
- Kombucha
- Sour cream, cottage cheese, aged cheese
- Look for “live active cultures” or use homemade fermented dairy foods
- Buttermilk, acidophilus milk



Hormonal Changes

- Estrogen plays important roles in the brain:
 - supports glucose metabolism in neurons
 - enhances synaptic plasticity
 - reduces neuroinflammation
 - supports mitochondrial energy production
- During menopause, estrogen levels decline contributing to:
 - increased brain energy vulnerability
 - changes in memory and cognition
 - higher long-term risk for neurodegenerative disease

Fight, Flight Or Freeze



- Decreased Digestion
- Reduced Immune system
- Decreased Endorphins
- Elevated Heart rate
- Increased Blood pressure
- Higher Blood sugar

Maintain Or Gain Muscle – 3 R's

R Resistance – challenging wt training

R Rest/repair – sleep for healing

R Refuel – Adequate, well-timed protein

Omega-3s for Your Brain & Body

- **Triglycerides:** Omega-3s can cause decrease triglycerides, usually in the range of 15–30%
- **Blood pressure:** Omega-3s can reduce blood pressure levels in people with high blood pressure
- **HDL-cholesterol:** Omega-3s can raise HDL ("good") cholesterol levels
- **Inflammation:** Omega-3s reduce the production of some substances released during the inflammatory response

Seafood Product		Omega-3 Per Ounce Cooked Portion
Herring, Wild (Atlantic & Pacific)	♥♥♥♥♥	>1,500 milligrams
Salmon, Farmed (Atlantic)	♥♥♥♥♥	
Salmon, Wild (King)	♥♥♥♥♥	
Mackerel, Wild (Pacific & Jack)	♥♥♥♥♥	

2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines

- More than 90% of women don't get enough fiber
- 97% of men don't get enough fiber



The Fiber-to-Microbe-to-Inflammation Chain Reaction

When fiber is low:

1. Gut microbes don't get enough fuel
2. Fewer short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) like butyrate are produced
3. The gut barrier weakens ("leaky gut")
4. Chronic low-grade **inflammation** increases
5. Inflammatory cytokines amplify joint pain and stiffness
6. Tissue repair and recovery slow down
7. Low fiber can lead to higher insulin resistance
8. Insulin resistance can lead to increased risk for weight gain, blood sugar dysregulation and metabolic disease

The Longest Running Study On Connection

- Having higher-quality close connections is more important for our well-being than the number of connections
- Having good relationships is not only good for our bodies but also for our brain

