

Leah's Wellness Guide—Resources and Tips for Better Living

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Hello!

One of the things that distinguishes my acupuncture practice from others is that I emphasize self-care. I give the people I work with resources so that they can be active participants in their healthcare. Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine are healing modalities that grew out of a tradition focused as much on promoting wellness as treating illness. There is a Chinese proverb that runs, “The superior doctor prevents sickness; the mediocre doctor attends to impending sickness; the inferior doctor treats actual sickness.”

What follows on this page is fifteen years of accumulated experience and wisdom from study, work with patients, and practice in my own life. I’ve divided things into three sections: general wellness advice, tips for dealing with pain, and tips for dealing with stress. Whether or not you ever come to see me at my clinic, it’s my hope that this knowledge will help you to live a healthier, happier, and more productive life.

General Wellness – Your Health Pyramid

I came across the “Health Pyramid” concept in an excellent book called “No Sweat: How the Simple Science of Motivation Can Bring You A Lifetime of Fitness.” It is one of the most useful books I’ve read on health, and I highly recommend it. If you don’t have time to read the whole book, read this book review by New York Times writer Jane Brody.

The author, Michelle Segar, writes that since time is limited, it is impossible to follow every health recommendation we “should” do. Therefore, it’s important to recognize the most basic, foundational thing you need to do in order to be healthy, and then structure your priorities accordingly. For me, I have to prioritize sleep over all other things. My health pyramid is sleep, then exercise, then diet. In other words, if it is a busy week, diet comes last. I’ve met people whose foundation is exercise. They’re able to sacrifice a bit on sleep. I’ve met other people whose foundation is social interactions. If they don’t spend enough time socializing every day, they get depressed and start to make poor health choices. We’re all different—be your own expert.

Sleep

For me, regular, sufficient sleep is an absolute necessity. If I shortchange my sleep only a few nights, I see a steep decline in my mood. That leads to poor health choices. I’ve also experienced periods of severe insomnia in the past, so I’ve spent a considerable amount of time reading about sleep and practicing better sleep hygiene.

The New York Times offers a number of “Wellness Guides” on its website, including this one on sleep. It’s a good place to start.

For a more in-depth look at insomnia and how to treat it (without medications), I highly recommend this series of articles on insomnia and cognitive behavioral therapy. I read

them when I was dealing with severe insomnia that began with the birth of my first child. The articles gave me reassurance at 3am on a sleepless night, and I've come back to them multiple times.

[Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia Part 1](#)

[Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia Part 2](#)

[Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia Part 3](#)

[Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia Part 4](#)

[Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia Part 5](#)

A number of patients I've worked with find it helpful to use a guided meditation on their phone before bed. A close friend of mine told me she put on Harry Potter audiobooks before bed during a period of intense work stress. She was waking frequently throughout the night and having panic attacks. She kept the Harry Potter audiobook running all night, would hear it as soon as she started to wake up, feel reassured, and then fall back to sleep. Obviously, she needed to resolve her situational stress, but sometimes that isn't possible. Instead, we find coping mechanisms that work.

My personal trick for sleeplessness, particularly if I wake around 1am and can't fall back to sleep, is to get out of bed and sit in a dark room in another area of the house. Too many sleepless nights can turn your bed into a source of anxiety, so that you will actually start to wake up when you lie down to go to sleep (I learned this from the articles I linked to above). If I wake up and can't fall back to sleep within twenty minutes, particularly if I start to feel my thoughts spinning, I get out of bed, walk through a dark house, and sit on a couch in my living room. I don't turn on any lights and I don't lie down. The next part is key. I sit quietly WITH MY EYES OPEN. Within ten to fifteen minutes, I will start to feel incredibly tired because my body is tired and I'm sitting in a dark room with no distractions trying to keep my eyes open. It's tough to do. As soon as I feel myself start to drift off, I lie down on a pillow and try to fall asleep. If I don't fall asleep within a few minutes, if I start to feel myself get anxious again, I sit back up and repeat the process. This was the technique I used to claw myself out of the deep, months long hole of insomnia I mentioned earlier, and it is a technique I've come back to during periods of stress.

Finally, many people don't sleep well because they literally have too much on their minds. They either can't shut off their brains before bed, or they wake up in the middle of the night worrying over a project or situation. My way of dealing with this over the years has been to use techniques from the organizational guru David Allen. I can say with confidence that reading Allen's book "[Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity](#)" has helped me to accomplish more in my life, and with significantly less stress. The book taught me an organizational system that allows me to be very active without feeling that my to-do list dominates my life.

Exercise

This section is for people who don't particularly like to exercise, or feel they are too busy to exercise. Often our preconceived notions of what "counts" as exercise prevents us from being active. That's unfortunate, as our bodies were designed to move. You don't need to sweat, go to a gym, wear special clothing, or do an activity for 30 minutes in order to have movement count as exercise. [This video on the myriad benefits of walking thirty minutes a day](#) always inspires me. It's from Dr. Mike Evans, a medical doctor and creator of the reframehealthlab.com. When I feel like I need to run a 5k or do HIIT training or take a spin class, then stop exercising completely because I don't like working out that hard, I come back and watch his video.

If you want to continue exercising consistently, the most important thing you can do is to notice the immediate, positive impact it has on your life. I mentioned Dr. Michelle Segar at the beginning of this section. Her research, along with others, demonstrates that people whose goals are weight loss and better health tend to spend the least amount of time exercising. The immediate rewards of exercising—more energy, a better mood, less stress and more opportunity to connect with friends and family—are far more motivating. I keep coming back to my thirty minute morning walk, even in the middle of winter, because I feel more energized and happier the rest of the day. If I skip that walk for a few days, I notice that I have a lower mood and I'm more irritable.

Find the type of exercise that works for you. I spent a long time trying to be a runner, and at one point I managed to run continuously for an hour. I'm proud of that accomplishment, but I never particularly enjoyed the running or how I felt afterwards. Now, I focus on what I enjoy. Since I spend so much time talking with people at work, I like to be alone when I exercise. I also like the exercise to be convenient so that it doesn't take up too much time. I walk for cardiovascular fitness, and I do yoga for strength-training, flexibility and balance. Generally, I don't do more than 30 to 40 minutes of either activity. If you're interested in yoga, a great place to start is yogaglo.com. The teacher I follow is Jason Crandell because he focuses on safe alignment. I also like that I can sort the classes by intensity and time. There are 90 minute classes (which I've never done) and 10 minute classes (which I have done). He also has classes specifically for when you're feeling tired, sick or generally low energy.

If you want something for strength-training, but don't like yoga, check out the "[Scientific 7 Minute Workout](#)". This routine uses a combination of interval training and body weight exercises. It's intense, but it only lasts for 7 minutes. For everything that you do, remember to check your ego at the door and modify as needed. If you can't do pushups, so what? Do your pushups against a countertop, or do them against the wall if you need to. For me, that's the beauty of working out at home—I'm not in competition with anyone other than myself.

One of the biggest mistakes I've seen other people make, and truthfully I've made myself, is to do too much, too quickly. Many of the initial gains we make in strength and endurance come from improved efficiency in our nervous system. To continue to make gains, though, we need to give our tissue time to adapt. Muscle adapts quickly, but connective tissues takes a six months to a year to remodel. If you strain

connective tissue through overuse, it takes a long time heal. As an example, I started rock climbing a couple years ago. I would love to climb two or three times a week, and I'm tempted to do so because I know I would improve more quickly. However, I'm almost forty years old, and my shoulders, forearms and hands hurt after a day climbing. At some point I may be able to climb a few times a week, but right now if I try to do more than one day a week climbing I tweak my shoulder. I could ignore my pain, and some people do, but I would be setting myself up for more serious injury.

Diet

In traditional Chinese medicine, a good diet is the foundation of good health. In fact, diet is so important that food therapy, similar to acupuncture and herbal medicine, is its own branch of medicine. Since starting school to become an acupuncturist fifteen years ago, I've slowly changed my diet. I'm healthier today than I was fifteen years ago, and a lot of that has to do with how I eat.

The suggestions that follows are what has worked for me, but if I've learned anything, it's that diet is very personal. Each one of us has a different metabolism, and a different relationship with food. For myself, I find it impossible to follow overly prescriptive diets. I also prefer to focus on all the different things I can eat, rather than focus on a list of things I can't eat. I think that has allowed me to maintain a healthy relationship with food, and to maintain enough flexibility in my cooking that I'm not at war with my husband or children.

Several years ago the science writer Michael Pollan published a short book called "[Food Rules: An Eater's Manual](#)." The book can be summed up in seven words: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." This is simple, but great advice. Limit processed foods as much as you can. Don't overeat or eat on an irregular schedule. Eat more vegetables, legumes and grains.

So what does this look like in practice? For me, this means creating a weekly menu, doing meal prep on the weekends, and having several ways to get extra vegetables in during the day. It means focusing less on super healthy dinners (a tricky meal at a tricky time of day, especially with kids) and more on my other meals and snacks throughout the day. It also means leaving room for some indulgence like drinking a limited amount of alcohol, and trying to be at peace with the fact that baking brownies and chocolate chip cookies is a favorite family activity.

As I said, I focus as much or more on snacks and meals other than dinner. That means bringing an adequate amount of food with me to work. If I don't, chances are I'll stop and pick up fast food on the way home, or make a detour to the grocery store and buy something from the bakery. That makes sense—the amount of will power we have is determined by blood glucose levels. If you get too hungry, your body will stop at nothing to make you eat. Once we get to that point, convenience trumps healthiness.

Speaking of will power, I have talked to many people who feel they should be able to prevent themselves from eating the cookies, ice cream or chips they stock in the house for other family members. I get it. I live with my husband, two children, my parents and my grandmother. We all have different definitions of healthy food, and we are constantly negotiating what is acceptable to the group. Personally, I find it much easier when that food isn't in the house. If everyone is dying for ice cream, we can go out for ice cream. Putting up barriers to treats mean we eat those treats more mindfully. However, I don't always get my way. That's why meal prep and a few other tricks to satisfy my sweet cravings are so important.

I have found it particularly helpful to do the following meal prep most weekends: make Mason Jar Salads that last for a week, cut up vegetables (mushrooms, onions, green peppers, sometimes leeks, sometimes spinach) that I keep in the fridge and make into a frittata before work, sometimes make a big pot of soup and divide it into smaller mason jars, sometimes roast a big pan of vegetables that I can eat as snacks during the week instead of bread or crackers, or make a large batch of freezer burritos with extra vegetables. Whole grains and/or beans, neither of which my family likes much, can go into jar salads, soups and burritos.

Here are a couple more tricks that help me with sweet cravings:

—When I cut out soda from my diet, I drank different “flavors” of LaCroix for at least a year before fully transitioning to water. The orange LaCroix in particular smells exactly like orange soda, which helped with my cravings. Now I mostly drink very hot water, which for some reason tastes better to me than room temperature water.

—I also slowly transitioned from milk chocolate to dark chocolate with the highest cacao percentage I could find. Dark chocolate is so rich, with a certain amount of bitterness, that it is impossible to eat it in the same amounts as milk chocolate. A serving size of this bar of chocolate is 1/3 of a bar, which is honestly enough to satisfy a chocolate craving. It only contains 3 grams of sugar (i.e. less than a piece of bread).

—I have relied heavily on green grapes during times of sugar cravings because they are so sweet. Whenever I notice that my diet has been slipping and I've started to indulge in chocolate chip cookies again, I stock grapes in the fridge to help me transition off baked goods. I tend to pair the grapes with all natural peanut butter on a piece of toast for the fat content. It fills me up, and helps me avoid the cookie jar.

I am not the person to talk about weight loss because I've never struggled with my weight. I can say that these two books, Why We Get Fat and What To Do About It by Gary Taubes and Fat Chance: Beating the Odds Against Sugar, Processed Food, Obesity and Disease by Dr. Robert Lustig, have had a profound impact on my understanding of why some of us gain weight easily, and how diet impacts our health. I had two big takeaways from these books. First, subcutaneous fat (the fat that sits on our hips, butt, arms, etc) is controlled by our genetics. It's almost impossible to lose this weight, but that weight also doesn't cause health problems. The fat that makes us sick is visceral fat in our abdomens, and anyone can have that—even a person who looks thin. That fat is toxic to our health because of the metabolic changes it triggers in our body. The good news is that it is also metabolically active, meaning it is very

possible to lose this weight. A healthy diet may not give you the body you want, but it will make you feel healthier and happier. If you are trying to lose weight, focus on how your clothes fit around the waist, not a number on the scale.

Managing Pain

Most of the pain I encounter in the clinic or in everyday life is a result of posture or poor movement patterns. Trauma does happen (an accident, a fall), but it usually heals quickly. It is repetitive movements—standing with your head too far forward while working on a computer screen, too much time texting on your phone, too much time driving in a car—that causes pain that lingers. For my own body, I first look at posture and movement so that I address the root of the problem, then I use stretches or acupressure points to unwind the tension I've created in the body. And for pain that doesn't seem to respond to anything? That's where mindfulness comes into play.

Posture

I am not a physical therapist, which is why I love the books and videos put out by physical therapist and trainer Kelly Starrett. His philosophy is that all people should have the tools to do basic maintenance on their body. I couldn't agree more. I highly recommend his book Deskbound to everyone. Becoming a Supple Leopard is another great book by Starrett, particularly if you engage in more strenuous physical activities or sports.

Starrett likes to prioritize the spine by teaching people how to properly stand. Follow along with this video to get an idea of where your feet, pelvis, shoulders and head should be whenever you are standing (it's not with Starrett, but uses his work). His book Deskbound also goes over correct movement patterns for sitting, bending over, lifting things off the floor, and carrying things overhead. I spent an entire month working on my standing posture, making it a priority to check in on my posture multiple times throughout the day. It helped immensely with low back pain. One of my goals for the new year is to spend another month just focusing on picking things up off the ground with proper form.

Stretching, Rolling, and Other Self-Massage Resources

Kelly Starrett is also the creator of the free YouTube series "MobilityWod", which contains over 150 videos on treating musculoskeletal pain. The sheer volume of his series makes it hard to navigate. I put together the following playlist, drawing on some of the "pain prescriptions" he presents in his book Becoming a Supple Leopard (silly title, great book).

Feet and ankles

Unglue your heel cords:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_g6ga4-PXY

Ankle MOB

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvf9-YynQg>

Plantar Fasciitis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsYLSjXVLR8&t=1s>

Pinchy ankles and weak feet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVVUa8aETgY>

Ankle Voodoo floss

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkOGccgWJi8>

Calf and Shin

Classic Calf Mobilization

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4cpBBDVGGU>

Heel Cord Lovin'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLj_VkfQzJl

Posterior Tibialis and Banded Heel Cord

<https://novom.ru/en/watch/tYp1U8-c7h4>

Calf Bone Saw

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDWchJ-Td9M>

Knee

Prescription for Creaky Knees

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuJ8NrMJj10>

Hamstrings

Hamstring ball smash

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvkKkCYzm2A>

Posterior Chain Floss

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDOeol7Ezbg>

Hamstring, low back and quads

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bjq8preeSjl&t=102s>

Adductors

Banded Super Frog

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTb3alz0Z8k>

Hip Flexors, Quadriceps

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdvJGaSB_Z4

Glutes and Hip Capsule

Delaminate your Posterior Bits

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0c7iKglr6J8>

Executive Athlete Mob

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkzFT6rRMhQ>

IT Band from Hell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdHah3xPx6E>

Butt/Hamstring/Hip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-th5SrJ1rQ&t=158s>

Clearing Hip Impingement

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_713h6iug30

Tight Hips

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRmT1mja4uk>

Trunk (Psoas, Low Back, Obliques)

Low Back Smash

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jsyu2Fy_FyA

Back Tweak—reset your pelvis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Js5xg9o78Jw>

SI Joint Pain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaePO6wQBtk>

Gut Smash

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8sSUsJ-bTY>

Shoulders and Chest

Shoulder Slnk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ARPjekZPJw>

Shoulder Smash

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmGgYuMWf1A>

5 Way Shoulder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eveYJP1indI>

Lats

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skHV4sTF3hI>

Upper Back

T-Spine and Breathing Mechanics

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p_9ew0Fe5Q

Scapular Mobility

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzozw2Aso3M>

Neck

Jill Miller and Neck Tissues

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i463R5HGdVg>

Neck 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGWdasfPi2I&t=158s>

Neck 2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRozBCFU_pA

Jill Miller on TMJ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWLfWNafR3Y>

For those of you who might like a gentler approach than Kelly Starrett, yoga teacher and myofascial expert Jill Miller is another great resource. I recommend her “[Yoga Tuneup Therapy Balls](#)” to most of the people I see for pain conditions. Miller also has a book, called [The Roll Model](#), but I think the strength of her program are [the video series](#) you can personalize to fit your needs. My playlist has several videos for the upper back and hips—the two areas on my body most likely to cause pain.

For those of you who would rather read a book than watch a video, [The Trigger Point Therapy Workbook](#) teaches how to locate and resolve muscular “trigger points” that are often the origin of common musculoskeletal complaints.

Chronic Repetitive Stress Injuries

Many people call me about tennis elbow and plantar fasciitis. Both conditions usually start out as some kind of overuse injury that simply refuses to heal. Part of the problem, as I mentioned earlier, is that injured connective tissue takes a long time to heal. I've given [this New York Times article](#) about a simple exercise to fix tennis elbow to at least a dozen people at this point, including friends and family members. It's taken care of the problem for almost all of them. [This second article from the New York Times](#) is about calf raises as an effective treatment for plantar fasciitis. Both my mom and I have used it to good effect. Finally, for a more in-depth look at "tendonitis" and how to treat it, [this detailed article](#) contains a lot of greater video links.

When Pain Doesn't Get Better – Mindfulness

Sometimes pain doesn't get better. Instead, a person finds himself at a point where he has to learn how to incorporate pain into daily life. That can feel like an overwhelming challenge. For many people, mindfulness meditation can be a path forward.

I first came across Jon Kabat-Zinn through his book "Full Catastrophe Living". Kabat-Zinn is the creator of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Hospital, and his work has been replicated and expanded on throughout this country over the last three decades. The MBSR program started with individuals who had severe and chronic health issues, including pain, and few good treatment options. The focus of the program was to improve those patients' quality of life. Kabat-Zinn writes that there are ways to work with pain, but the first step is to "put out the welcome mat" for pain. It's a counterintuitive, powerful approach, that has helped me and millions of people around the world. Kabat-Zinn is a prolific author, but I prefer his first book [Full Catastrophe Living](#). [This audio cd of guided meditations specific for pain management](#) is also a good bet.

Managing Stress

Stress is the primary or aggravating cause of most cases of illness. Even if a disease clearly has an organic cause, relaxation can improve the body's capacity to heal. In traditional Chinese medicine, the state of a person's "*shen*" (spirit), is of integral importance to their health. The spirit impacts the body, the body impacts the spirit, and both impact quality of life. I've divided this section into three parts: working with the mind, working with the physical body, and reframing. This is a collection of ideas and practices that have helped me at various times throughout my life. Some of these I come back to frequently, some have made only a brief, but important appearance.

For a general overview of ways to manage stress, check out another [great video by Dr. Mike Evans](#).

Working with the Mind

Turning off the Brain's "Default Mode"

The brain's "default mode network" is a large scale brain network made up of interacting brain regions. It is active when a person is not focused on the outside world and the brain is at wakeful rest, such as during daydreaming and mind-wandering. It is also active when a person is thinking about others, thinking about themselves, remembering the past, and planning for the future.

All these are important activities for our brain. They allow self-reflection and growth. However, some of us can get stuck in default mode and feel like our brain is always "on". We can replay scenarios over and over again, get stuck on a certain idea and have a hard time letting it go, or find ourselves trending toward negative, repetitive thoughts.

There are a variety of ways to address this issue, but one thing that always gives me comfort is knowing that it is possible to turn off the default mode in any instant I choose. Essentially, our brain cannot be in default mode when we activate some other large system of our brain, such as the visual cortex, auditory cortex or motor cortex. You can't think about your problems when you are exercising at your maximum level. You also can't think about your problems when you are staring intently at the world around you, taking in every piece of visual information down to the smallest shifts in shadow, texture and color. It's hard to stay in this very alert, focused place of mind for longer than a minute or two, but sometimes that is enough to recenter myself and find a better frame of mind.

Journaling

I like to tell people that acupuncture works by moving qi (energy) through your body. There are a variety of ways to move qi, though. Exercise is an important one, as is emotional expression. Sometimes we are confronted with difficult situations for which there aren't any easy solutions. I have found journaling to be a helpful practice in such moments. The way I journal is to write three pages, stream of consciousness, every day for several days in a row. I just write whatever comes into my head. Usually after a page I start to get into what's really bothering me. Once I finish writing, I shred the pages or throw them out. They are not to keep. They are definitely not to review. They are simply a way to get everything that is rolling around inside my head onto the page.

I find journaling helpful because I tend to self-censor. I don't want to be judged. At times I don't want people to know what I'm really thinking because what I'm really thinking is pretty negative. A journal is a place where I can be as mean, petty, vindictive, childish, whiny, cruel, fearful, etc., as I need to be. Getting those emotions onto the page helps me release them. It's also why those pages go immediately into the trash.

What I've noticed, and what I've seen happen for many others who do this practice for a few weeks, is that within several days to a couple weeks, my writing starts to shift. Once I've had an opportunity to truly express myself, to exhaust those emotions, I start to find solutions to the problems that are bothering me. Have you ever tried to give advice to a person who was stuck, only to find that they didn't want your advice and

had no intention of listening to you? We are more likely to listen to our own advice. What starts as a practice to express emotions, turns into a practice that allows us to solve our own problems.

Mindfulness Meditation

It took me a long time to start practicing meditation regularly. For many years, I only turned to it when times were tough. Even in small doses it can be powerful. I try to meditate for ten minutes every morning, and it definitely helps with my mood and emotional reactivity.

The biggest misconception about meditation is that you aren't good at it if you aren't able to "quiet your mind". The truth is that the almost immediate mental distractions that you experience are perfectly normal. The practice of meditation is to gently bring your focus back, for example to the breath, as soon as you notice that your mind has wandered. It's ok that your mind wanders—that gives you the opportunity to practice.

I personally find it easier to do guided meditations, and I particularly like the app "Headspace". You can try it for free for ten days, which is long enough to start seeing some results. The reason I like Headspace so much is that the creator, a former Buddhist monk, does a good job teaching some of the fundamental concepts of mindfulness.

I may not meditate every day, but I try to be mindful as often as I can. What that means is that I try to be aware of how my mood or state of mind impacts my perception of myself, my life, and the world around me. As an example, most people tend to have a more negative outlook on life when the weather is bad. Another example is I'm much more likely to get upset and yell at my children when I'm hungry. Mindfulness has helped me find more calm in my life, and has helped me to be a happier, less judgmental person. A great introduction to mindfulness is the book "Full Catastrophe Living" by Jon Kabat Zinn. Or you can check out some of Kabat-Zinn's youtube videos.

Working with the Physical Body

Power of Posture

Our bodies can change our minds, and our minds can change our behaviors and beliefs. Spending time in a power pose, even for brief periods of time, can increase your testosterone, making you feel more confident, and decrease your cortisol, making you less reactive to stress. In situations where you feel powerless, lack confidence, social settings that make you uneasy, find a quiet spot and take a power pose for two minutes. You will feel more confident, and others will perceive you as more confident. I love this TED talk from researcher Amy Cuddy.

https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en

Breathing and the Stress Response

Breathing has an enormous impact on our nervous system. Our breathing patterns change depending on whether we relaxed and safe, or stressed and under threat. When our upper back muscles get tense, whether from stress or poor posture, it can affect how we breathe, which in turns affects how we feel. Working out the kinks in our back can actually make us feel much more relaxed. This video from yoga teacher Jill Miller shows the rolling techniques I like to do on my back. They help with my posture, mood, and breath. Remember, if this is too painful to do lying on the floor you can also do it against a wall.

<https://bit.ly/2OioRwa>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfhqL2Ytq0w>

Pranayama (Breath work)

Breath work can be a powerful tool to combat stress, making it great for our health. Breathing is the only function we can do completely consciously or completely unconsciously. Breathing is controlled by two different sets of nerves and muscles. As a result, breath is the only function through which we can influence the involuntary nervous system. Imbalances of the involuntary nervous system underlie many common disorders.

Breath is also a connection between mind and body. Breath work can help you harmonize the impact of the mind on the body. Putting your attention on your breath is like putting your consciousness on neutral. When you feel upset or angry or fearful, you can trace those emotions to particular thoughts or images. You can't stop thoughts or images, but you can learn to divert your attention. A safe place is the breath.

Here's a video demonstration (<https://www.drweil.com/health-wellness/body-mind-spirit/stress-anxiety/breathing-three-exercises/>) from Dr. Weil of three different breathing techniques. To really be effective, these techniques have to be practiced every day. I try to do the relaxing breath at least twice a day, hopefully more. I find myself calmer and less reactive throughout the day.

Reframing

Rewriting Your Story

The stories that we tell ourselves about our health, our relationships, our value as a person, can have a profound impact on our health and happiness. Taking a personal narrative and rewriting it can be a powerful way to change our mindset.

After writing down the story (be as brief or as detailed as you chose), take a moment to reflect on it and then do one of two things:

- Ask yourself if this is an honest assessment? Are there obstacles in your way that you are choosing not to acknowledge? By acknowledging those obstacles, could you potentially feel less stuck and therefore able to make forward progress?
- Is there a way you could reframe this story? Imagine listening to this story as though you were your best friend. Are you being objective, or are you actually being overly critical. We are often harsher on ourselves than we are on others.

For more information on the research behind this suggestion, check out:
<https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/19/writing-your-way-to-happiness/>

Gratitude Practice

One of the best ways I have found to deal with a difficult person or a difficult situation is to try and find something about that person or situation for which I'm grateful. I realize that being told to "find the silver lining" by another person can be extremely irritating. However, at a certain point, the only thing we have control over is our mindset.

In my own life, I tend to use a gratitude practice when I'm dealing with illness or with a situation that is unfair. I say thank you for the opportunity to grow as a person, to be more patient with my body or with life, to be reminded of what it feels like for others who have experienced similar situations. I also tend to use gratitude practices when dealing with people I find to be aggressive or insulting, or people who frustrate me. I say thank you for the opportunity to set aside my ego and try to truly listen to that person. Often they're trying to tell me something important, though the message may be wrapped in pain. Occasionally, all I can muster is a thank you that I am lucky enough to travel through life on a happier road than the person confronting me. I may say these thank you through gritted teeth and not completely feel like I mean them at the time, but it does help.

This is a great article on some of the research behind gratitude practices that you might find helpful: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/opinion/sunday/choose-to-be-grateful-it-will-make-you-happier.html?>

Jon Kabat-Zinn's 9 attitudes of mindfulness.

I mentioned Jon Kabat-Zinn in the previous section. Here's a playlist featuring Kabat-Zinn as he discusses the nine attitudes that a person cultivates through mindfulness practice. The nine attitudes are: non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, letting go, gratitude, generosity and acceptance. All of the attitudes are embedded in each other. Each is a door into all the others. In all Asian languages the word for heart and mind are the same, so that mindfulness really means heartfulness. Although many people, including myself, discovered mindfulness as a way to address physical or emotional pain, practicing mindfulness has many rewards. It has helped me be a better person, both for myself and for others.

The entire playlist is here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkgahhWgJW97ADlyc2BYMwOD8wZjcBZ8D>

Living Wholeheartedly

This video of Brene Braun on the power of vulnerability is one of my all time favorites. She speaks as a social worker and researcher. Her message is that we cannot selectively numb an emotion. If we try to numb pain or guilt or shame, we also numb our ability to feel joy, connection, and meaning. Instead, we can choose to be vulnerable, and in this choice, live with our whole hearts. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>