

- BOOK 1 OF THE FREEDOM FORMULA SERIES -

YOU'RE  
NOT  
THE PROBLEM

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End the overwhelm, restore your energy,  
and make progress that lasts

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WORKBOOK

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LORI MONTRY

# INTRODUCTION

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This workbook is to be used alongside the book, *You're Not the Problem: End the Overwhelm, Restore Energy, and Make Progress that Lasts*. It will serve as your guide and companion every step of the way. Reading the book helps you understand your adapted patterns and how they have shaped your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and life circumstances. This workbook provides the roadmap for shifting from the Adapted Self into the Expansive Self to create a life of agency, authenticity, and dignity.

As you begin, remember:

*The goal is not to fix yourself or eliminate every challenge or reaction.*

*The goal is to return to your Expansive Self.*

Your Expansive Self is the authentic, resourced, capable version of you. It's the you that meets life with clarity instead of reactivity, steadiness instead of collapse, and with choice instead of compulsion. Your Expansive Self doesn't force change. It is the change you seek. Every integration exercise in this workbook helps you move closer to that state.

## Support Leads to Progress

There are many steps along the path back to your Expansive Self, and none of them are about willpower or self-criticism. Instead, we're focused on understanding your adaptations, building safety in your nervous system, and gently interrupting patterns that no longer serve you.

# YOU'RE NOT THE PROBLEM

## WORKBOOK

Try not to skip exercises, even if they seem simple or redundant at first glance. Each one works on a different layer of your system. Some build awareness, while others build regulation. Still others help you practice responding differently in real time. Together, they create momentum.

When you feel the expected resistance, boredom, or urge to rush through an exercise, gather this as data. These are the places where your attention is needed most. That resistance is the result of your old patterns fighting to stay alive. As long as we proceed with support and love rather than harshness, we will succeed.

This workbook is not asking you to become someone new. It is helping you understand how you adapted, why those adaptations made sense, and how to create the conditions that allow different choices to emerge naturally.

Take your time. Be honest. Be curious. Most of all, remember this: You are not the problem.

You are returning to your Expansive Self!

## How to Use This Workbook

You do not need to complete this workbook perfectly or quickly for it to be effective. In fact, rushing through it often reinforces the very patterns you are here to change. Move at a pace in which you can stay present with the material. If an exercise brings up discomfort, that doesn't mean you are doing it wrong. It means you are touching something of significance. Some exercises may feel like you're going through the motions, and others may feel surprisingly emotional or revealing. Try to roll with it and trust that you'll get what you need from the work when you need it.

### You may want to:

- revisit exercises more than once
- write briefly on some days and more deeply on others
- pause between chapters to notice what shifts in your body, behavior, or awareness

There is no finish line here, only increasing access to yourself. The more compassion and attention you bring to this process, the more effective it will be.

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Each book chapter corresponds to a workbook chapter. The workbook includes all of the integration from the book and offers additional insights, exercises, and suggestions.

My suggestion is that you read each chapter in the book, then spend at least a week with the integration exercises of the workbook before moving on. Let each chapter take as long as you need to feel complete, but don't get caught up on mastering it before moving on. You're embarking on sacred work here. I am excited to meet your Expansive Self.

## Before You Begin

Take a moment to pause before starting the first chapter.

- What are you hoping will be different in your life as you do this work?

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- What feels most difficult right now?

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- What would feeling even slightly better look like?

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# CHAPTER 1

## Your Mind-Body Adaptations

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This chapter is about your truth, and the ways you learned to navigate life.

As you read in Chapter 1, your adaptations developed in response to your life circumstances. For many of us, those life circumstances were considered traumatic, and for others, they were challenging but not necessarily traumatic as defined by the outside world. Before we go any further, I want to clarify what I mean when I talk about trauma. Trauma is not a ranking system, and it is not reserved for the most extreme stories.

*Fundamentally, trauma is the experiences or events you lived through that overwhelmed your nervous system. It is what felt like too much, too fast, too soon, or too alone.*

Importantly, two people can live through the same event and have completely different nervous system responses. The difference is not character or strength. The difference is context, capacity, and support. What else was happening in your life at the time? What had you already been carrying? Who was there with you, and who wasn't? What did you already believe about yourself and the world? All of that shapes whether an experience is felt as manageable or as overwhelming.

Many people struggle with the word trauma because they associate it with obvious abuse, war, or catastrophic events. You may even find yourself thinking, "That word doesn't apply to me," or "Other people had it worse." If that is you, please understand: you do not need to use the word trauma at all for this work to help you. In this workbook, you can think in terms of *overwhelming experiences* and *adaptations* because we all have these. The point is not what to

call experiences. It's what it did inside you, and how your system adapted as a result. We all had overwhelming experiences, and we all adapted to them. Once you start looking through this lens, your patterns stop looking random, and they start making sense.

## Your Personal Adaptations

Most adaptations are not formed in response to a single dramatic moment. They develop slowly, through repetition, like a steady drip of water filling a bucket. Each experience adds a little more information about how the world works, what is safe, and what is not. Over time, that information begins to shape how you see yourself, others, and the world. That perception then becomes how you think, feel, and act. How you think, feel, and act create your life circumstances. It's not a stretch to say your life is built by your adaptations.

Paige's story offers a clear example of how this process unfolds.

When Paige was a child, she was often shamed by her parents when she asked questions they believed she should already know the answers to. One particular moment always came to mind. It was when she was about eight years old, and she brought a page of homework to her father to ask for help. He glanced at it and said, *"You're in third grade. You should know how to add fractions by now."*

Paige did not pause to evaluate whether that statement was accurate. Her class was just beginning to work with fractions, so there was no objective reason she should have mastered the skill yet. Her father's comment was unfair and unhelpful, but Paige was not in a position to assess fairness. She was a child. What mattered most to her nervous system in that moment was being accepted, approved of, and loved by her father. To a young girl dependent on the adults in her life for survival, the moment felt unsafe.

Because she could not challenge the situation externally, her mind adapted internally. Without conscious thought, she formed a belief that it was unsafe not to know the answer. That belief did not feel like a conclusion she reached. It felt like reality.

From that point on, Paige began striving to get everything right. She worked extremely hard to know the answers and became skilled at hiding uncertainty when she did not. School became

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a source of constant stress. She feared being called on. She feared being exposed. She feared the moment someone might realize she did not know something she believed she should.

This mental adaptation followed her into college, then into law school, and eventually into her legal practice. In environments where it was impossible to know everything, her days were filled with tension and pressure. Every interaction carried the underlying fear: *What if I don't know the answer?* The belief system that formed in childhood organized her adult life around fear and overpreparation.

At the same time these mental adaptations were forming, Paige's nervous system was adapting as well. Every one of these experiences was registered by her autonomic nervous system. Her body learned, again and again, that not knowing was dangerous. Each time her system perceived a threat, the hypothalamus, pituitary, and adrenal glands released stress hormones designed to help her survive. Those responses were helpful in the moment. Over time, however, they became her baseline.

Paige lived with a constant sense of unease. Her system rarely felt settled. Even on vacation, during moments that were meant to be restful, there was a background vigilance that never fully turned off. She tried meditation and breathing practices, yet her body struggled to feel relaxed, present, or safe. She dealt with digestive issues for years, and at forty-two, she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. That was when we began working together.

From the perspective of her nervous system, the world was full of danger because it was full of unknowns. Since unknowns had been associated with shame and rejection, her system stayed on alert, scanning constantly for what she might need to know next. Her nervous system was in survival mode, and she rarely experienced a true sense of safety or rest.

From these mental and nervous system adaptations, Paige developed patterns of behavior that, from the outside, might have looked like self-sabotage but were designed to protect her. She overworked and overprepared. She stayed hypervigilant. She avoided situations where she might be seen as uncertain or unprepared whenever she could. She did little socializing because social interactions felt risky. Being visible meant being exposed. Rest felt unsafe because rest meant letting her guard down. Her life became increasingly unbalanced. Fun, enjoyment, ease, and pleasure were scarce. Yet the need for pleasure and relief did not disappear.

That's important to note. All human behavior is oriented toward safety and pleasure. When those needs are not met directly, we find other ways to meet them. Paige found relief through food, sugar, wine, scrolling on her phone, and zoning out in the evenings. These coping mechanisms were not failures of discipline. They were attempts to regulate a system that was chronically overactivated. They offered moments of relief, moments of escape, moments where the pressure eased just enough to keep her going. The problem was not that she used coping mechanisms. The problem was that they came with consequences.

Because so much of her capacity was spent on stress, vigilance, and overpreparation, and because her body was further taxed by alcohol, sugar, and chronic tension, there was very little energy left for the behaviors she genuinely wanted to adopt. She struggled to consistently move her body. Keeping her home tidy felt impossible. Engaging regularly with somatic and mindset practices, including the work in *Unstuck* and *Unstoppable*, felt like too much for a system already in overwhelm.

She knew these activities would support her, yet she could not reliably get herself to follow through with them. Paige's life illustrates the full arc of how adaptations work to create a lived reality. Let's slow it down and review this arc in a simple, linear way.

## Experience

As described, Paige grew up in an environment where she was shamed for not knowing things. Her parents did not intend harm. They were overwhelmed, stretched thin, and lacking the capacity to teach patiently. Their exasperation reflected their own stress, not Paige's worth or intelligence. Still, the experiences accumulated.

## Mental Adaptation

Over time, Paige's brain formed the belief that it was dangerous not to know the answer. Her mind then began collecting evidence to support that belief. When a teacher praised a child for knowing the answer, it reinforced the story. When she got a math problem incorrect or saw the big, red X through her sentence in an essay, it reinforced the story. Eventually, her own inner voice became the one doing the shaming. The belief system became solidified.

## Nervous System Adaptation

Her nervous system learned to treat uncertainty as a threat. Her body stayed on alert, anticipating what might go wrong and trying to prevent exposure. High activation became normal. Feeling settled felt unfamiliar. Sleep, digestion, hormonal balance, and other bodily systems were affected.

## Actions and Behavior

Paige overworked, overprepared, avoided vulnerability, and limited connection. She organized her life around preventing the possibility of not knowing.

## Coping Mechanisms

She turned to sugar, wine, scrolling, binge-watching, procrastination, and numbing behaviors to find moments of pleasure and relief.

## Consequences

Her health suffered. Her weight increased, she became prediabetic, and her energy dropped. She could not consistently engage in the very practices that would have supported healing. Her relationships and overall life satisfaction declined.

Throughout all of this, Paige was not lazy, broken, or lacking willpower. She was trying to meet her needs for safety and pleasure in the only ways her system knew how. This is the lens I invite you to begin using with yourself. Stop attributing your behavior to personal failure. You are not weak or unmotivated. You are not a problem to fix. Your system adapted intelligently to the life you lived.

One adaptation, layered over time, led Paige to organize her entire life around the fear of not having the answer. There were many dangers in her daily reality because there were many unknowns. Her system responded exactly as it was designed to respond to threat.

As you move into the exercises that follow, you are not looking for what is wrong with you. You are beginning to trace the arc of how your experiences shaped your adaptations, how those

adaptations shaped your behavior, and how that behavior shaped your life. Understanding this arc is the first step toward changing it.

I've provided some space to write your answers here in the workbook, but more is better, so don't feel constrained by the space available. Add as many pieces of paper as you need to feel complete with your answers.

### Exercise One

## What were the overwhelming life experiences you need to acknowledge to yourself?

If you need help identifying your overwhelming experiences, consider the following:

1. What experiences from earlier in life are still feel etched in your mind? Note that sometimes memories are etched and sometimes they are pushed down and forgotten, so just because you have a vague memory (or even no memory) of an experience doesn't mean it wasn't overwhelming for you.

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Remember, we aren't only looking for events that rise to the level of some imaginary definition of trauma. We are looking for the ones that challenged your system and left you feeling unresourced.

Clients have shared events such as being caught doing something relatively innocent but getting in trouble for it, being teased, losing their keys, getting lost, discovering a parent had other children no one knew about, being shamed for a mistake, not being invited to a birthday party, being told they were not wanted, living with an alcoholic parent, losing a parent, and many more experiences that may not be considered traumatic by everyone.

Take time over the next few days to acknowledge the experiences that felt overwhelming to your young system.

## Exercise Two

### What beliefs do you carry about yourself, others, or the world that feel hard to let go of?

Common beliefs are things like: "I have to earn love." "I'm too much." "I'm responsible for everyone else's happiness." "I'm not enough unless I..." "Everything is my fault." "It's not safe to need." "I'll never be successful." "People aren't safe." "People don't like me once they get to know me." "If someone sees my faults, they will reject me." "Nothing ever works out."

These beliefs often operate in the background of our minds, subtly shaping how we see ourselves, others, and the world around us. I think of them like the music playing in the background at the grocery store. You're aware that something is playing, but you don't notice it until you stop and pay close attention.

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Often, we only become aware of these beliefs by looking at the evidence they create in our lives, such as the situations we keep finding ourselves in, the patterns that feel stuck, or the decisions we make that don't serve us. When you start to tune in, you'll begin to see how these beliefs have been influencing you. Once you recognize them, you have the power to change them. That awareness is the first step toward creating new patterns that align with who you are.

*Sarah, a 34-year-old entrepreneur, shares:*

*"I've spent my whole life feeling like I have to earn love. I feel that if I'm not constantly doing something for others, I'm not worthy of their love. It's exhausting, and deep down, I always feel like I'm one mistake away from being abandoned. I can't remember a time when I wasn't worried that if I stopped giving, I would become useless and worthless. My worth feels tied to what I can do for others, and it feels like no matter how much I give, it's never enough."*

*John, a 45-year-old father, reflects:*

*"I was raised to believe that success was everything. If I wasn't crushing it, I wasn't enough. I remember being a kid and looking at my dad, thinking, 'If I can just be successful like him, everything will be ok.' Now, years later, no matter how much I achieve, it never feels like enough. Success is like this ever-growing mountain, and no matter how much I climb, I'm always at the bottom. I'm constantly running to catch up with something that's just out of reach. Not only that, I don't even know who I am when I stop running."*

**Your turn:** What beliefs do you carry that feel hard to let go of?

As you reflect, notice how they show up in your life and the circumstances you face. What evidence does your mind use to reinforce these beliefs?

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### Exercise Three

## As you sit with your beliefs, where do you feel them in your body?

Beliefs we hold about ourselves manifest physically in our bodies, even when we're not consciously aware of them. For example, the belief that "I have to earn love" may show up as tightness in the chest or shoulders, while the belief that "I'm too much" can manifest as a sense of heaviness or tension in the stomach. These physical sensations are the body's way of reflecting the emotional weight and mental patterns we carry, signaling that our beliefs affect our well-being in ways that go beyond the mind. By tuning in to these physical cues, we can tap into the body's wisdom and unravel the deeper stories of our human experience.

Sarah feels the weight of her belief as a constant tightness in her shoulders. It's like she's carrying a heavy load but doesn't know how to put it down. Her chest feels like it's being squeezed, making it hard to breathe fully. Every time she considers letting go of her need to please, she feels a wave of anxiety. Her body would love to rest, but her mind pulls her into a constant state of doing. She is quite literally afraid to stop.

John notices his chest tightening whenever he thinks about not measuring up, and his breath becomes shallow. The tension in his neck and jaw tells him that there's so much he's been holding in, so much pressure to perform that he doesn't know how to release. He wonders if he'll ever feel like he can just be without the weight of expectation.

**Your turn:** Where do you feel your beliefs in your body?

Do you notice any sensations like tightness, pressure, or a sense of being "stuck"?

How does your body respond when you think about these beliefs?

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## Exercise Four

### What are your go-to reactions when you feel uncomfortable?

When we hold limiting beliefs, we often turn to coping mechanisms or avoidance behaviors as a way to shield ourselves from the discomfort they create. This might look like overworking, staying busy, shutting down, or turning to food, alcohol, scrolling, binge watching television, shopping, or other behaviors. These reactions are our mind and body's way of managing the discomfort, but they only perpetuate the patterns we're trying to escape, keeping us trapped in a cycle of temporary relief rather than lasting transformation.

Sarah's belief that she must earn love by doing more and being more manifested in several areas of her life:

- **Work:** Sarah constantly volunteers or says yes to extra tasks at work, even when she's already overwhelmed. She feels guilty if she says no, thinking that if she doesn't go above and beyond, her colleagues or boss won't think she's worthy or valuable. This

leads to burnout, as she keeps pushing herself beyond healthy limits, all to prove her worth to others.

- **Relationships:** Sarah often gives more than she receives in her personal relationships. She's always the one to organize family gatherings, buy thoughtful gifts for everyone, and put others' needs ahead of her own. She feels that if she doesn't do these things, people won't love her the same way. This creates resentment over time, as she feels drained and unappreciated.
- **Self-Care:** Despite being physically exhausted and mentally drained, Sarah struggles to take time for herself. Instead of resting or taking a break, she feels guilty if she's not being productive. Even though it seemed strange to admit it, she realized her inner dialogue says, "If I rest, I'm not doing enough, and I won't be loved."
- **Coping and Distracting Behaviors:** When she finally has a moment to herself, usually late at night, Sarah finds herself scrolling on her phone and eating ice cream as a way to finally "come down." She knows this pattern is hurting her in the long run, but in the moment, it feels like the only way she can settle down at night.

John's need to prove his worth through success shows up in several key areas of his life:

- **Work:** John often feels like he's running a race with no finish line. Even when he meets a goal or earns recognition at work, it never feels satisfying. He pushes himself to climb the next rung of the corporate ladder, believing that reaching the top will finally bring him the peace and fulfillment he craves. However, the higher he climbs, the more isolated he feels, because his achievements come at the cost of meaningful relationships and personal happiness. He constantly moves the bar higher, telling himself, "If I can just get there, everything will be ok," but "there" always moves further away.
- **Home Life:** John struggles to connect with his children because he's so focused on his career. Additionally, he views their milestones, good grades, and excelling at sports as extensions of his own success. If they're not number one, he feels like he's failed them. This pressure strains their relationships because the children have developed the belief that they're not enough unless they're constantly meeting John's high standards, and the cycle is thereby perpetuated.

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- **Emotional Health:** On a deeper level, John has moments of doubt where he questions what he's really chasing. He asks himself, "What happens when I get there? Will it be enough?" He's afraid to slow down and confront those feelings, because that might mean facing the truth that no matter how much he achieves, it never fills the void. Living with the void with no hope of filling it is more than he feels capable of handling. He avoids moments of introspection or vulnerability, burying his emotions under a pile of tasks to complete. This leaves him emotionally exhausted and unable to process what he's feeling.

**Your turn:** What are your go-to reactions when you feel overwhelmed, unsafe, or unworthy?

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Do you overwork, eat, withdraw, camp out on the couch, lash out, or turn to other coping mechanisms? How do these reactions affect your relationships, your body, and your well-being?

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## Exercise Five

### Can you remember when this pattern started? What was happening in your life? How might this pattern have served or protected you?

Our patterns begin in moments when we tried to survive or cope with life's challenges. These coping mechanisms, though they may not serve us now, were once ways we protected ourselves or tried to feel safe in situations where we didn't know how else to respond. Reflecting on these moments provides a deeper understanding of the part of you that was *just trying to get through*. Think of this as a journey into the roots of your story, where you can recognize how your patterns began and what role they played in your survival. The intention isn't to shame or blame yourself (or others), but to offer compassion for the ways your mind and body adapted to tough circumstances. With this understanding, you can begin to rewrite those patterns with new truths and a stronger sense of self-trust.

Sarah recalls times in elementary school when she overheard her parents arguing. She was terrified that if they didn't get along, they wouldn't love her anymore. As a result, she did everything she could to please them and to prevent disagreements—keeping the house neat, excelling in school, and trying to keep the peace. She felt that her safety was tied to how well she could keep the harmony. While this pattern helped her navigate a chaotic home life, it also reinforced the belief that she must earn love and acceptance rather than being inherently worthy of them. Over time, it hardened into a protective habit that no longer serves her.

John remembers a time when he won an award for excellence in school. His father didn't show much emotion but nodded and said, "*Good job, son. Keep it up.*" It was the first time John felt he had done something that made his father proud. But instead of feeling elated, John felt the pressure grow. The reward didn't feel like validation; it felt like a higher bar had

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been set. From that moment on, he was even more driven to keep achieving, fearing that if he stopped, his dad wouldn't approve of him and his worth would diminish. The pattern of measuring his value by success became a way to keep himself safe from feeling unimportant or invisible. As an adult, he realizes that this pattern only adds stress, leaving him feeling like he's on a never-ending treadmill with no true sense of fulfillment.

**Your turn:** Can you recall a time when this pattern first began? What specific event or circumstances do you remember that reinforced this belief? You may run across the same experiences you identified above or different ones.

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How did this pattern help you feel safe or valued in that moment?

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## Exercise Six

### What might be possible if you could rewrite these patterns with new ones based on truth, wholeness, and self-trust?

Imagine how your reality could shift if you no longer believed the limiting beliefs you discovered in the exercises above. For example, what doors might open if you trusted that you are enough exactly as you are, and that your value isn't dependent on what you do or how much you achieve? By changing the beliefs that shape your perception, you can create a life where peace, fulfillment, and connection flow naturally because your inner world is aligned with the truth of who you are.

Sarah begins to imagine what it would feel like to release the pressure of "earning" love. She envisions a life where she no longer feels the need to prove her worth through acts of service and people-pleasing. Instead, she sees herself in relationships where love is given freely and received equally, knowing that her value isn't dependent on what she does but on who she is. In this new way of being, Sarah realizes she can set boundaries that protect her peace without fearing she'll lose love. It's a life where she trusts that love is abundant and that she is deserving of it just as much as anyone else. This shift feels like a deep exhale, a sense of freedom and peace she's only just beginning to experience.

John envisions a life where his value isn't tied to his success or achievements. He imagines waking up each day without the weight of constant pressure to prove himself. Instead, he can rest, savor simple moments, and enjoy the small victories without fear that it will all slip away. He sees himself walking through life with confidence, knowing he is enough simply by showing up as his authentic self. No more mountains to climb or races to win. He realizes that worthiness comes from within, and that he is worthy, just as he is.

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**Your turn:** What might be possible if you rewrote your patterns with new beliefs grounded in self-trust, wholeness, and truth? How would your life look if you felt free to be who you are, not defined by external success or approval? As you try on your new beliefs, where do you feel them in your body? Contrast this to the way your old beliefs feel in your body.

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Don't worry if the new beliefs you come up with feel like a significant reach for you. Even if only five percent of you can believe your new belief, you're doing great. Over time, your ability to adopt new beliefs will grow. For now, just try them on for size.

In addition, don't worry about identifying every single adaptation you may have or that you understand them all fully. As you go through the rest of the book and workbook, you will get to know your adaptations more intimately, along with what's needed for you to feel safe enough to leave them behind. For now, let your current awareness be enough and remember: You're not the problem. You're adapted, and now, you're becoming.

Give yourself a full week or more to explore and refine your responses to these questions. By diving deep into your adaptations, you're not just reflecting on your past; you're creating space to rewrite the future.

## Pattern Snapshot

If it helps, summarize what you've discovered so far:

**My overwhelming experience(s):**

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**The belief that formed:**

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**How my body responds:**

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**My go-to coping reactions:**

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## CHAPTER 2

### Your Nervous System Is Talking—Are You Listening?

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To stop reacting to life on autopilot and start choosing your actions and your life circumstances, the first step is awareness. Not the vague, “*I stress-eat sometimes,*” or “*I feel anxious a lot,*” kind of awareness. I’m talking about the scientific observation of your own nervous system in action, with curiosity and not judgment.

As you tune in, you’ll see that your nervous system is always responding to your environment and the thoughts you think. It’s scanning for safety or danger 24/7, and when it senses danger of any kind, it switches you into survival mode.

This week, your mission is to track the state of your nervous system using the nervous system cylinder model. There is a printable tracking sheet at the end of this chapter to help you keep track of your data. Feel free to include other information as well.

Here are the steps:

**Step 1** - Check in with yourself five times a day to determine where you are on the cylinder: Are you in the glorious 1-3 home base range, where you are in touch with the calm and resourced version of you? Are you in the slightly activated zone of 4-5, where you feel dynamic and ready? Or are you in the high sympathetic zones of 6-7, in which you feel wired and frantic? Or are you above seven in the freeze state, where overwhelm has you shut down and unable to fully function?

Of course, in the beginning, you’ll be guessing. That’s ok. You’ll get to know your system over time, and rating it will get easier.

**Step 2** - Part of the tracking process is to note what's happening around you. For example, notice the time of day, noise, smells, and events that may be contributing to the state of your nervous system (traffic, deadlines, lack of sleep, too much on your plate). This will help you determine your triggers. For example, does your system always become stressed in the late afternoon or when you encounter a particular situation or person?

**Step 3** - As part of identifying your patterns, it's also useful to identify the thoughts that send your nervous system into overdrive. Often, it's not just external stressors that hijack your nervous system; it's the stories you tell yourself about who you are, what you must do to be worthy, and what will happen if you don't get it all right.

Let's break down some of the common thought patterns that you're likely to encounter.

## Meet Your Inner Chaos Crew (a.k.a. The Thought Patterns That Hijack Your Nervous System)

These sneaky mental habits don't just live rent-free in your mind; they *own the building*, and when they take over, your nervous system treats them as facts, raising the activation in your cylinder. Let's get to know them:

### 1. The Helper: *"Other People's Needs Are More Important Than Mine."*

You're the go-to person and the one everyone relies on. The one who says, *"No problem, I got it!"* even when you absolutely *do* have a problem and *don't* 'got' it. Your value feels tied to how much you do for others, and deep down, you believe that love and approval come from being useful.

#### **Why this triggers your nervous system:**

- Constantly putting yourself last sends a message to your body that your needs don't matter.
- Resentment builds up, but expressing it feels unsafe, so the stress simmers under the surface.

- Burnout becomes inevitable because *who's taking care of you?* (no one, because you've trained everyone that you don't need help.)

## 2. The Achiever: “*The More I Do, The More I’m Worth.*”

You live by to-do lists. You feel restless when you're not *producing* something. Worst of all, you measure your self-worth by your achievements, not who you are. You chase external validation like it's an Olympic sport.

### Why this triggers your nervous system:

- You're always in “push” mode, which means your nervous system never gets to rest.
- Achieving something gives a brief dopamine hit, but it's quickly followed by... nothing. Consequently, you chase the next thing and the next and the next.
- The fear of failure (or even slowing down) makes relaxation feel dangerous.

## 3. The Perfectionist: “*If I Don’t Get It Right, I’m Not Safe.*”

Perfectionism isn't just wanting things to be exceptional; it feels like your *safety* depends on getting them just right. Because perfection is impossible, you might find yourself stuck in procrastination paralysis or overworking to make sure nothing ever falls short.

### Why this triggers your nervous system:

- Your brain sees messing up as a life-or-death situation (even though it's not).
- The stress of trying to control every detail keeps you in constant fight-or-flight mode.
- You live with the ever-present anxiety that you're about to fail at something, you just don't know what yet.
- Getting things perfect is rarely achievable, so you live in a perpetual state of disappointment.

#### 4. The Overthinker: *“If I Worry Enough, I Can Prevent Disaster.”*

Your mind is *never* quiet. It's constantly scanning for potential problems, running worst-case scenarios, and making sure you're prepared for anything life might throw at you. Because if you're not hypervigilant, something bad could happen, right?

##### **Why this triggers your nervous system:**

- Your brain treats every thought as a real threat, keeping you in a state of chronic stress.
- There's never a moment of true rest because what if you miss something?
- Trusting yourself (or life) feels impossible because your brain is convinced disaster is always around the corner.

#### 5. The Controller: *“If I'm Not in Control, something Bad Will Happen.”*

You like things just so. Plans? *Must be followed.* Surprises? *No, thank you.* You step in to take charge because trusting others feels risky, and uncertainty is your personal nightmare.

##### **Why this triggers your nervous system:**

- The world is inherently uncontrollable, which means you're in constant battle mode.
- Small disruptions feel huge, making you reactive to even minor changes.
- Vulnerability feels dangerous, so you keep a tight grip, but the pressure is exhausting.

#### **Your Nervous System is Just Following Orders**

You may identify other thought patterns that are activating for you. If so, note them in the same way. If any (or all) of these patterns sound like you, don't panic. You're not the problem, and this isn't a personality flaw. These are just survival strategies (adaptations) your brain developed to keep you safe. Once you recognize these patterns and how they are impacting your nervous system, you can start shifting them.

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After a week of checking in with your nervous system five times or more a day and noting the circumstances and thought patterns that are contributing to the state of your system, take time to reflect on your findings. Consider these questions:

- What patterns did you notice?

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- Are there specific triggers that come up repeatedly?

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Remember, awareness is the first step toward making conscious, aligned choices. You're not here to judge your responses, but to notice and understand them.

I encourage you not to move forward until you've completed this assignment for at least seven days. You don't have to be perfect, and this practice is more than just getting a check mark. It's designed to help you learn about your nervous system and your patterns.

*The integration in this book won't help you if you plow through it to get all the answers. It will only help you if you roll around in it and discover your patterns and yourself.*

I'm speaking to you from my personal experience because I know what it's like to skim the material and lose out on real change. I wrote this book to share real science, life-changing tools, and an established path toward resilience. Blazing through the information without integration will not work. Trust me, I tried it, more than once (or more than 100 times). I even found myself listening to five or more audiobooks a week at double speed so I could hurry up and get all the answers to my problems. Silly me! The answer was not in acquiring information; it was in *applying* the information. To be successful, you've got to integrate what you're learning and let things sink in.

As you begin implementing your five times per day check-ins, decide how you want to view them. If you view them as something you must do to "fix" your broken self or one more thing you have to fit into an already overflowing schedule, this practice won't take hold. We humans don't follow through on practices to fix our broken selves. We follow through on practices that feel loving and supportive.

Instead of perceiving this practice as a burden, chore, or one more thing you have to try to fit in, I invite you to see it as an act of self-respect and kindness. You deserve to have someone checking in on you many times a day. Let curiosity and love be the motivation to pause amidst the chaos and ask the question – *how ya doin?* That's what this practice is about.

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In the table below, you will be invited to rate your nervous system on a scale from 1-10 and record any other data you can in the moment. Don't worry about getting the number exactly right. The goal is pattern recognition. Each check-in can be one minute or 15 minutes long. It's up to you and your schedule.

In the seven days (or more) you're tracking your nervous system and gathering invaluable data, reread the chapter, check out my YouTube channel for supportive videos, stay engaged with the material, and most importantly, put in the time and effort to get to know your nervous system. I promise it's a worthwhile endeavor.

## Daily Nervous System Tracker

<b>Date</b>	<b>Rating 1-10</b>	<b>Time of Day</b>	<b>Contributing external or internal factors/ general notes</b>	<b>Body Symptoms (how do I know my system is at this level)</b>	<b>Thought Patterns Present</b>
1-22-26	5.5	9:00am	Just arrived at work and feeling ready to take on the day, but the to-do list seems big, and that's causing my system to get riled.	My stomach feels queasy and unsettled. My jaw is tight. I am clenching my teeth.	Everything is so hard. I always have too much to do. How will I complete everything? Others will be disappointed if I don't get it all done.

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**Daily Nervous System Tracker** (print extra copies for additional days)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Rating 1-10</b>	<b>Time of Day</b>	<b>Contributing external or internal factors/ general notes</b>	<b>Body Symptoms (how do I know my system is at this level)</b>	<b>Thought Patterns Present</b>

# CHAPTER 3

## Building Your Foundation for Embodiment

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You are on the amazing path of shifting from your adaptations into your Expansive Self. As you have read (or heard) many times now, that requires three foundational elements: Safety, Capacity, and Energy.

Safety can only be felt in the body. While your thoughts contribute to the state of your nervous system, you can't think your way to safety. It is something your body *feels*. If you don't understand this or have no idea what safety feels like in your body, don't worry, and please don't give up. I remember how confusing this discussion was for me twenty years ago. I learned to shut down to my body very early in life, so I had no reference point for what safety would feel like. As I began learning about somatic work in my training and certification programs, I was lost. I had no idea what they were even talking about. It was like they were asking me to see ultraviolet light with my naked eye.

Even though I had no idea what it would feel like, I was curious and hopeful enough to engage in somatic work, and over the course of about nine months, I began to see what wasn't visible to me before. Eventually, I was able to be with the sensations of my body, and within a few more months, I understood how to respond to my body in ways that brought safety and regulation.

I offer this personal example because I realize that becoming embodied and finding safety in the body is not always straightforward, even when you are doing your best. Consistency and a willingness to keep trying even when it seemed that nothing was changing are what helped me the most.

The integration work for this chapter is meant to prepare your system for the deeper somatic practices ahead. By gently working with the three challenges to embodiment that we explored in the book's chapter, you'll begin building the internal safety your nervous system needs to heal.

## Exercise One

### Performing Your Five Times Per Day Check-ins

Continue the five times a day check-ins you began in the previous chapter. This week, we're adding a few simple but powerful steps to those check-ins. Here's your new practice:

#### Step 1: Tune In

During your check-ins, continue to rate your nervous system and identify what's contributing to its state. But now, I also want you to note what's happening in your body. At each check-in, close your eyes for a moment and turn your attention inward. Ask yourself, "*What's happening in my body right now?*"

You might feel awkward at first, like you're learning a new language, but try to be open to what is present. The goal is simply to notice sensations, not analyze them. You might find tightness in your chest, pressure behind your eyes, fluttering in your stomach, or tension in your shoulders. You might even find nothing at all. These are all messages. It's how your body communicates.

#### Step 2: Feel the Sensations

Once you've identified a sensation, stay with it, even if what you're staying with is the lack of sensation. You're not trying to figure it out or make it go away. You're simply giving it space to exist without judgment. Name it if you can: *tight, heavy, tingly, hot, nothingness*. Then stay with the sensation for about one minute. If that feels too long, try 30 or even 15 seconds.

If you find the sensation uncomfortable or painful, do your best to expand your tolerance gently without pushing past your window of tolerance. Keep in mind that you are in charge of the experience, so rather than trying to do it "right," tune in and listen to what you need.

As humans, we tend to judge any feeling or sensation that isn't pleasant as "wrong," and we try to get rid of it by pushing it down, drowning it out, or numbing it away. It's a true art form to welcome all of our feelings and sensations (the pleasant as well as the unpleasant) with the same love and compassion. Our programming has taught us to get rid of difficult feelings as quickly as possible.

However, your feelings are your compass. They let you know what is important to you and show you how to navigate life. This step allows you to practice staying with sensations of all kinds. Do your best with it for now and trust that your ability to stay present will grow over time.

### Step 3: Notice Shifts

As you stay with the sensation, pay attention to what happens.

Does the sensation move? Does it intensify or soften? Maybe it lingers exactly as it is. All of this is normal. You're learning to observe your body without needing to fix anything.

Here's an example from Bridget's nervous system check-in journal:

**March 5, 1:30 p.m. — Nervous system: 7–8.**

The morning was extra busy and included an unexpected meeting. These meetings are usually triggering for me because Neil, my supervisor, often points out what we haven't done instead of what's going well. That leaves me feeling like I'm failing, even when I've met my own enrollment goals. By the time the meeting ends, I'm already planning how to prove myself. It triggers my old thought pattern: *Everything is my fault*. No wonder I'm craving a coffee and a pastry, even though I just ate lunch. Inside my body, I feel unsettled, like a swarm of angry butterflies in my midsection. I also feel floaty, like my head isn't fully connected to my body.

Bridget didn't just identify a nervous system state; she connected it to a trigger, tracked her thoughts, and noticed what was happening in her body. This was not easy for her at first, and developing these skills took months of practice. Give yourself time to become a proficient tracker.

## Step 4: Make Friends with Your Sensations

This final step is about shifting from observation to relationship.

Rather than resisting or resenting what you feel, try welcoming your body's sensations as visitors carrying important information. If it helps, give them a name or image, just like Bridget did with her "angry butterflies."

Now, speak to the sensation kindly. For example:

*"Hello, angry butterflies. I see you fluttering around in my stomach. You're trying to tell me I'm anxious and afraid I'm not doing enough. That's a heavy load. Thank you for showing up and letting me know what you're carrying."*

By acknowledging your sensations rather than trying to fix or avoid them, you interrupt the fear spiral that often forms between body and mind. When a thought triggers a sensation or a sensation triggers a thought, they reinforce each other. Your job is to step in with compassion, curiosity, and presence. This doesn't require you to "get it right." It only asks that you show up.

Keep in mind that you're not trying to change the experience. Instead, you're creating safety around it. That alone is a powerful shift. With practice, this gentle presence with your body will become the foundation for deeper healing.

If at any point this practice feels overwhelming, shift your attention outward, move your body, or stop. You are always in control of the process.

Even if you can't imagine it now, you'll soon come to learn that your body's sensations are your inner compass. They will serve as an inner GPS for navigating life. Being cut off from your GPS is scary. Imagine needing to go somewhere you've never been in an unfamiliar area of town. What would you do? You'd put the address in your phone or car's GPS and confidently drive there. What if I told you to put the address in the GPS, but then cover it and turn the volume off? No doubt you would feel lost.

That *lost* sensation is how we feel when we are cut off from our body sensations. We feel like our GPS has been taken offline. This week's integration exercises are good practice for tuning back into your inner compass.

After completing this check-in, take one slow breath, open your eyes, and gently orient to your surroundings. Notice something neutral or pleasant in your environment before returning to your day.

If it's helpful to you, continue using the tracker from the previous chapter and add the information about your body sensations in your journal.

## Exercise Two

### Making Space for Your Growth

For your second integration exercise, I invite you to set aside at least 30 minutes to review how you currently spend your time each day. What activities currently take up time but do not support your well-being or priorities?

Then, make a firm, committed decision about how you'll make space for your work with the Freedom Formula.

What are you willing to set aside, put on hold, or reprioritize so that you have the time, space, and capacity to follow through with this work? I've left space below for your brainstorming session. Don't simply think about this question. Offer yourself concrete ideas and solutions. Without creating time for the integration work, you won't experience change. It's very common to believe that insight alone will produce results, but it doesn't. Knowledge and insight are crucial components of change, but so is integration. It's where the action is!

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Finally, if you find that connecting with your body's sensations feels overwhelming, or it's too much to handle on your own, you don't have to do this alone. Reach out to a trusted resource or connect with us at [www.LoriMontry.com](http://www.LoriMontry.com). We're here to support you through our group and 1:1 coaching sessions as you navigate the process of reconnecting with your beautiful (but sometimes rocky) inner world.

# CHAPTER 4

## Building Your Resources

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In chapters three and four of the book, we explored an important truth about safety: it must be felt in the body. The nervous system does not decide what is safe or dangerous through thought. It decides through sensation. Safety shows up as a softening in the body—a face that relaxes, a breath that deepens, a sense of warmth or lightness that signals to your system that it can lower its guard. This ability to notice and feel the body's sensations is what we call embodiment, and without it, lasting safety is not possible.

Two predictable barriers often stand in the way of embodiment. First, the body does not respond to instructions. You cannot simply tell your nervous system to calm down and expect it to comply. If your system has spent years learning that the world requires vigilance or protection, it will continue returning to those states until the conditions genuinely support something different. Quick tips and calming hacks can sometimes help in the moment, but lasting safety requires something deeper. The body gradually updates toward safety when it experiences consistent support, patience, and the opportunity to release the layers of survival energy it has been carrying.

The second barrier is more challenging. The issue here is that the same doorway that allows us to feel warmth, ease, and safety also opens to grief, fear, and other uncomfortable sensations stored in the body. We cannot selectively feel only what is pleasant. Embodiment means staying present to sensation as it is, both the comforting and the difficult. When we avoid those sensations through food, distraction, or numbing behaviors, we unintentionally shut down access to safety as well. This is why the practices you are about to explore are so

important. They help you build the resources, both external and internal, that allow you to approach your body's sensations safely and gradually. With the right support, what once felt overwhelming becomes navigable, and over time, your system begins to experience what it may not have felt for a long time: a genuine sense of safety in your own body.

The following integration allows you to build your external and internal resources that allow you to access your body's sensations. Safety grows as you are able to stay with bodily sensation, including discomfort from both past and present. External and internal resources make this possible. They offer enough security and support to enter difficult territory and return to steadiness on the other side.

The integration supports you in two ways. First, by continuing your five times per day check-ins, you strengthen your commitment to learning about your nervous system and supporting it. This practice is your guiding light as you move from adaptation to expansion. Second, you will build internal and external resources so that embodiment becomes possible for you.

## Exercise One

### Performing Your Five Times Per Day Check-ins

Continue the five times a day check-ins. These check-ins are essential for rewiring the nervous system and shifting into your Expansive Self. Follow the same steps offered in the last chapter.

## Exercise Two

### Building Your External Resources

Begin developing your external resources by listing what is available to you and making use of them. Survival mode skews our perception of the world and can cause us to ignore sources of support. This exercise will help you identify them and utilize them more effectively.

Using the table on the following page, list three to five entries in each of the four columns: People, places, professional support, and groups.

People might include a friend who listens without fixing.

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Places might include a park bench where you feel grounded. I have a little space between my vanity and the wall in my bedroom that is the perfect protected area for me to curl up with a blanket when I want a sense of safety. I also find my back patio to be a source of calm and comfort.

Professionals might include a therapist, coach, or physician. Even if you don't have professional assistance at this time, list some anyway because it reminds you that they exist. This book can be a professional resource since it offers science, insights, and integration from many professional sources.

Groups might include a class, faith community, or one of the You're Not the Problem group cohorts. You can explore resources at [www.LoriMontry.com](http://www.LoriMontry.com), which include options for 1-to-1 support, group programs, and a free Facebook community.

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## External Resources

People	Places	Professionals	Groups

## Exercise Three

### Accessing the Sacred Self

Internal resourcing grows from a living connection with the Sacred Self. Without that presence, parts work can feel destabilizing because it places the difficult challenges of life in the foreground without a way to hold and tend to them. The Sacred Self provides the steady ground, the wise witness, and the compassionate leadership that makes working with your parts possible. When that connection is active, your system has somewhere safe to stand while you meet what needs to be seen and tended to.

A strong connection also makes internal resourcing practical. The Sacred Self helps you pace yourself because it knows how to honor capacity and choose steps that are kind and doable. It lets protective parts relax because someone trustworthy is present to lead.

Set aside time daily (or at least five times per week) to connect with Sacred Self for 5-10 minutes. More is better, but even a few minutes is helpful. Here is a summary of the suggestions from the chapter for developing a relationship with your Sacred Self.

#### 1. Believe it exists

Know deep in your bones that you have a Sacred Self and that with consistent and intentional practice, you will be able to access and engage with life as this self.

#### 2. Create the time and space

To access the Sacred Self, it's essential to create a designated time and space. This kind of meeting deserves and is facilitated by the atmosphere you create for it.

Your inner sanctity deserves as much reverence as any other divine space. Create a corner of your life for sacred self. When you cross that threshold, your system receives unmistakable cues that this space exists for meeting what is wise, grace-filled, and steady within you.

Consider feeding all your senses with such cues. I keep what helps me feel grounded and inwardly connected nearby. In my space, you'll typically find journals and books, crystals, goddess cards, my mala beads, incense, and other objects from time to time. As a side note,

I have curated *Morning Practice Box Sets* at [www.LoriMontry.com](http://www.LoriMontry.com) for those who want help choosing meaningful items.

In addition to setting up your space, I invite you to include sound to welcome the Sacred Self. Choose music that helps connect you to the presence of the divine within.

The next consideration is time. Sacred space deepens when you meet it regularly, at a moment of the day when calm and capacity are most available. For most people, this is morning, before the world begins to ask of you. Returning at the same time each day teaches your nervous system what to expect, and over time, the ritual itself becomes a signal of safety.

Finally, I invite you to view your designated time with your Sacred Self as a meeting rather than a task. Arrive as you are, allow the senses you have welcomed to do their quiet work, and know that when you enter your space, you are opening a door to the divine within. Over time, the space remembers you, your nervous system recognizes the ritual, and the Sacred Self steps forward with greater ease.

### 3. Embodiment and safety

Embodiment is an important aspect of your connection with Sacred Self and your work with the parts for three reasons. Firstly, it is nearly impossible for your system to be in a state of high activation and be in touch with Sacred Self at the same time. High activation means your nervous system is revved, anxious, collapsed, or swinging between states.

Secondly, relating to your parts requires embodiment, because each part speaks through the body with tightness, lightness, heat, heaviness, flutter, or numbness, and you can only meet a part well if you are aware of its sensations.

Finally, the wisdom to guide and nurture your parts as the Sacred Self rises through body sensations. Your body becomes a compass that guides understanding and choices, as we explored in the last chapter. For these three reasons, you'll want to make embodiment part of communing with your Sacred Self.

After settling into your Sacred Self space, begin your practice with a scan of your body and an offer of support. For example, if I notice a tightness in my chest or a flutter in my tummy,

I will place my hands there and let them settle. I am not trying to take away the sensations, only lovingly support them. I may also feel a lightness in my heart or a sense of joy that feels like a bubbling stream within my middle. Spend a few minutes with your sensations and let your system learn that what you feel will be met with care.

Another way embodiment can help access your Sacred Self is to identify the body sensations that are associated with connection to your Sacred Self. You can then use these sensations at times when connecting is more difficult. Imagine wisdom, grace, and love flowing through you. At first, you may need to imagine it. For some people, there is a small flame in the solar plexus or a warm feeling in the heart. Others see a beautiful, divine light coming down into their head. Whatever the sensation is for you, spend a few minutes focused on it. For example, place your attention on the flame and give it your full presence. What color is it? How big is it? Can you make it bigger through your focus?

The inner flame or light is just one example. Connection with my Sacred Self often feels like an expansion in my heart, as if it might burst. Use your body sensations to call forth the brilliant parts of you. As you practice, embodiment and safety begin to weave together. The body learns that what it feels is welcome, and the channel for wisdom opens further.

#### **4. Imagination**

If you haven't spent much time connected to Sacred Self, the idea can feel distant, almost unreachable. This is where your imagination is helpful. Mental imagery recruits many of the same sensory and emotional networks as real experience, which helps an inner presence feel tangible rather than abstract. Repeating the same image with consistent sensory cues teaches your system to recognize and return to that presence more readily.

Let an image begin to form, not as an exact portrait but as a felt companion you can relate to and meet. Perhaps your Sacred Self moves with quiet simplicity, wears flowing garments, or owns a pair of wings.

Notice the colors that belong to your Sacred Self and the symbols that feel like home. Over time, the image stops feeling like make-believe and starts feeling like someone you can access.

Your Sacred Self can take shape through non-human images, too. Some people sense their Sacred Self as the sun, an eagle in flight, or an animal that embodies steadiness and grace.

A final suggestion would be to contemplate a beloved figure, such as a goddess, saint, angel, someone you admire, or an ancestor whose love feels near. Let one image or archetype stay with you for a while so it can ripen. Allow your imagination and these symbols to make your Sacred Self feel close and real, a companion you can meet easily as you enter your sacred space.

## **5. Revisit a time when you were connected with your Sacred Self**

Perhaps you have had an unmistakable moment of connection with your Sacred Self. Maybe it arrived on a quiet shoreline, during meditation, on a tree-lined walk, in a sanctuary, or beside someone you love. Your memory of that experience can serve as a kinesthetic anchor for returning to that state. When attention lingers on where you were, the quality of light, the sounds around you, the temperature of the air, and the way your body felt, the nervous system can lean back toward that same steadiness. The feeling may not be identical, yet the pathway is the same, and returning to the memory can strengthen trust that this presence is real and available.

It isn't necessary to do all five, or any of these invitations every time you sit down to connect with your Sacred Self. However, they are valuable steps for first-timers or anytime you struggle to get connected.

As you begin connecting with your Sacred Self, it can feel like it is not working, or that you can touch it sometimes and not others. Do not judge a single session or moment. Look at the pattern over the weeks. What matters most is that you show up. Consistency builds the relationship the way steady visits build trust with a friend. Keep choosing the practice, keep returning with kindness, and over time, you will notice that steadiness lasts longer and becomes easier to find.

Aim to spend time with your Sacred Self at least 3-5 times this week. The more consistent you are with your practice, the stronger your connection will be.

## Exercise Four

### Building Your Internal Resources

Once you feel a connection with your Sacred Self, start building your internal resources through regular and consistent use of the I Got You Practice. This practice is useful in the moment when you feel a part rise and as part of a regular morning practice where you meet and call forth the parts that frequently show up in your life. Here are the steps.

#### ICVC (Identify–Connect–Validate–Care): The I've Got You Steps

##### I — Identify

Notice what is here. Name the feeling and locate it in the body.

##### C — Connect

Engage with this part and listen without fixing.

- Try: *"I am here with you. Tell me everything. I will stay."*
- Support the area of the body that is experiencing the sensations and emotion through your hands, breath, pillow, or other object.
- Listen to all the parts that are ready and willing to share with you.

##### V — Validate

Honor the truth of the feeling and the context that shaped it.

- Try: *"Of course, you feel overwhelmed in these circumstances. It makes sense that you feel this. It reminds you of how your mom complained whenever she had to do anything for you or how you were shamed so many times for not knowing the answer."*
- Remember: Validation brings safety. The only goal is to recognize what is true for the part.

## C — Care

Support and follow through.

- Try: “*What do you need from me today? What is one kind step I can take now?*”
- Possible options: Adjust a deadline. Ask for help. Rest. Set a boundary. Nourish. Step outside. Schedule the next small action.

Stay with these exercises until your resources feel steady. Then you’ll be ready to move on to the next chapter and more somatic awareness.

# CHAPTER 5

## Building Your Somatic Toolbelt

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As you've been learning, embodiment is a key element in achieving safety, the first pillar in your shift from the Adapted Self to the Expansive Self. Breaking free from survival mode requires three things: Safety, Capacity, and Energy. Although we discuss them separately, they are deeply connected. What affects one affects the others. In this section of the book, we focus on safety, because without a felt sense of safety in the body, the other two pillars cannot fully develop.

Safety is not an idea; it is a physiological state. Until your nervous system senses that it is safe, it will continue to prioritize protection over connection, caution over creativity, and shutdown over joy. This is why mindset work alone can only take you so far. You cannot think your way out of survival mode. You have to work with your biology, and that begins through embodiment.

Embodiment means becoming aware of the sensations in your body and learning to be present with them. The tightness in your chest, the flutter in your belly, the heaviness behind your eyes, or the tension in your shoulders are the body's language. They often reflect stored stress, unmet needs, or unresolved emotions that your system has been carrying for a long time. Somatic practices help you listen to this language and respond to it with compassion and attunement. Rather than trying to force your body to calm down or feel a certain way, you begin to meet what is actually there. Over time, these repeated experiences teach your nervous system that it is safe to let go of its protective patterns.

This is where the integration practices come in. Knowledge alone does not change the nervous system. Your body learns safety through lived experience. The practices in this section are designed to help you notice what your body is holding and respond in ways that build trust within yourself. As you begin to listen and respond to your body's signals, you create the conditions that allow survival energy to gradually release. This is the bridge between your Adapted Survival Self and your Expansive Self. Through these practices, you will begin to experience what safety in your own body feels like.

The integration for this chapter is simple. You're going to add on to what you've already been doing. During your five times per day check-ins, continue rating your nervous system, identifying what's contributing to its state, and noting what's happening in your body. You'll also feel the sensations and befriend them in the same way.

What you'll be adding is one (or more) of your new somatic exercises. Which exercise should you choose? The one that your nervous system seems to be asking for. At first, you may not have a sense of which one it is asking for. Don't worry about getting it right every time. Do your best to listen and choose the one that first pops into your head. Over time, you will become masterful at responding appropriately to your system. For now, get to know the exercises and your system a little better. Refinement can only come through integration.

Here are the steps for your check-ins with this add-on.

- 1. Tune in:** Begin by closing your eyes and tuning into what's happening inside. Ask yourself: "What's happening in my body right now?" Start by noticing simple things, such as the tightness in your chest, tension in your shoulders, or butterflies in your stomach.
- 2. Feel the Sensations:** It's tempting to avoid discomfort or move on from this exercise quickly, but the key to working with your body is being willing to *feel* it, not push it away. This doesn't mean wallowing in the emotion but rather allowing the sensation to exist without judgment. For example, if your stomach feels tight, simply notice it. Label the sensation: "tight," "tingly," "heavy." You don't have to understand it, just recognize it and allow it to be. Aim to stay with the sensation for at least a minute.
- 3. Notice Shifts:** As you sit with the sensation, be on the lookout for changes. The tension might begin to loosen, the tightness might decrease, or the discomfort might move to

a different part of your body. If you notice the sensations increasing, that's a normal experience as well. Notice without judgment.

- 4. Making Friends with Your Sensations:** Treat your sensations like a visitor who has come to share important information. If it helps, you can give them a name or an image. Then, have a gentle, compassionate, and affirming conversation with them as we discussed in earlier examples.
- 5. Ask what somatic exercise from the chapter the sensations would like to work with, and practice it.**

You can find video demonstrations of the somatic exercises on my website, the link is: <https://www.lorimonty.com/sample-somatic-practice-library>

I recommend following along with the videos for the first couple of weeks while you develop awareness of the exercises.

These exercises are not prescriptive. You should always modify them according to your body's wisdom and requests.

This is how Bridget's check-in might have gone with the new step added:

*"Well, hello, angry little butterflies. I see you fluttering around in my tummy. It seems like you're telling me you feel anxious, that we aren't doing enough, and that we feel responsible for the entire department (and, oh, by the way, for the whole world). That's a lot to carry! What exercise do you think would be most supportive to you right now?"*

*"Since you're feeling like the load you have to carry today is heavy, the push away seems like a great choice. Let's try it and see how we feel afterward."*

Keep in mind that you are not looking to calm the system. You are looking to respond to your system. There is a meaningful difference between the two.

It is wonderful when an exercise leads to calm, yet the nervous system will often resist calm if calm does not feel helpful or safe in that moment. When you consistently respond to your system with an exercise that meets its actual need, you begin to build long-term safety through your own attuned caregiving.

Most of us did not receive the level of attuned caregiving we needed when we were young. Our caregivers were doing the best they could with the resources they had, yet many of our nervous systems learned to manage stress without consistent support. Your somatic practice becomes a way of offering yourself the kind of responsive care that helps a nervous system settle and trust over time.

The beautiful thing about this work is that the resource you needed then is available to you now. Each time you pause, check in, and respond to what your body is communicating, you strengthen your system's sense that someone is paying attention and that your experience matters.

Stick with this exercise diligently for at least seven days before moving on to the next chapter.

## What if it doesn't seem to be working?

You may notice that your check-ins begin to happen more automatically as the week goes on. If you find that you are still struggling to be consistent, take a moment to gently explore what might be getting in the way.

Some people discover that they have not yet learned to value their own healing time. Others notice that their system is simply too activated or too shut down to pause easily. Both of these experiences are common.

If consistency continues to feel difficult, consider reaching out for additional support. Developing a somatic practice sometimes requires guidance, especially when the nervous system has been carrying a heavy load for a long time.

Struggling with the practice does not mean you are doing something wrong, and it does not mean this approach will not work for you. It may simply mean that your system needs a little more support as it learns a new way of being cared for.

# CHAPTER 6

## Building and Protecting Capacity

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Before we move into the integration work for this chapter, let's briefly revisit the idea of capacity as outlined in the book's Chapter 6. Capacity is the difference between knowing what needs to change and having the internal resources to follow through. Many people believe they struggle with change because they lack discipline, motivation, or willpower. In reality, the problem is often much simpler and much more compassionate than that. Their system is out of capacity.

When your nervous system is overwhelmed, depleted, or constantly operating in survival mode, there is no room to integrate something new. Change requires energy, attention, and the ability to stay present through discomfort. If your system is already working overtime to survive the day, even the best tools can feel impossible to use consistently. This is why so many people try again and again to change, only to find themselves slipping back into the same patterns. The issue is not effort or desire. The issue is that the system is stretched beyond what it can currently hold.

In this chapter, we begin looking at capacity through the metaphor of a bank account. Your life runs on a kind of internal currency made up of energy, emotional resources, and nervous system regulation. When your capacity account is funded, you can meet life with steadiness. You can think clearly, respond thoughtfully, and follow through on the things that matter to you. When the account is overdrawn, everything becomes harder. You rely on coping strategies, small tasks feel overwhelming, and your system becomes more activated. The practices

in this chapter invite you to make intentional deposits and learn how to protect the resources you already have so your capacity account stays funded.

## Exercise 1

### Cues of Safety - Building Your Capacity Account Through Deposits

As you continue your five-times-a-day check-ins, you'll now intentionally add a cue of safety. Over time, these small deposits build the capacity your system needs to thrive.

Making small deposits throughout the day is not just a helpful practice; it is masterful. The more regularly you tend to your capacity account, the less likely you are to reach a point of depletion where recovery feels difficult. When your account is already drained or dangerously close to empty, everything becomes harder, including making deposits. The nervous system in a stressed or survival-driven state struggles to notice or take in cues of safety. Furthermore, what might cost you only a few capacity dollars when your system is well-resourced can suddenly cost you considerably more when you are running on empty. Waiting until you feel completely overloaded to begin attending to your capacity is like trying to fill a leaking bucket while it is tipping over. Small, steady deposits prevent this cycle and help you maintain a more balanced, resilient system.

Here are examples of cues from the chapter you can explore. Just remember that these are not boxes to check; they are invitations to explore with presence. Let your body guide you toward what feels nourishing in the moment:

#### Sensory Deposits:

- **Sight** – noticing beauty in your environment (colors, textures, light through a window, nature)
- **Sound** – soft music, nature sounds, birds chirping, quiet tones that feel calming
- **Touch / Texture** – offering yourself or receiving loving touch from another, holding a smooth stone, soft fabric, warmth of a teacup, exploring the texture of natural objects

- **Scent** – inhaling a scent that feels grounding (fresh air, essential oils, natural fragrances)
- **Taste** – savoring a sip or bite of something nourishing (tea, flavored water, a simple mindful taste experience)

### **Somatic Deposits:**

- **Breath** – a few slow, intentional breaths, letting your system register the flow of breath through the body
- **Movement** – gentle stretching, swaying, grounding postures, whatever movement feels supportive
- **Presence within the body** – simply tuning in, placing a hand on your heart or belly

### **Connection Deposits:**

- **Warm Connection** – making eye contact with a loved one, sharing a hug, exchanging a kind word
- **Self-Connection** – offering yourself a compassionate inner phrase (*“I see you.” “I’m here.”*), or acknowledging your efforts with kindness

You do not need to do all of these cues at once. One small cue, consistently offered, is enough to begin building new patterns of safety and support. Over time, your system will start to anticipate these moments as a natural part of how you live.

**Here are the steps for your check-ins with this new layer of practice:**

#### **1. Tune In.**

Begin by closing your eyes and tuning into what’s happening inside. Notice simple things, such as the tightness in your chest, tension in your shoulders, butterflies in your stomach, or a sense of numbness. Whatever you find is welcome.

## 2. Feel the Sensations.

Gently stay with the sensation for at least a minute. There is no need to fix or change anything, just feel.

## 3. Notice Shifts.

As you stay with the sensation, watch for any changes. The tension might loosen, move, or shift in intensity, or it may stay the same. All of this is normal. Notice without judgment.

## 4. Connect with the Sensation.

Treat the sensation like a visitor who has come to share information with you. You can give it a name or image if that helps. Have a gentle, compassionate conversation with it. Ask: *What do you need? What would feel supportive right now?*

## 5. Explore a Somatic Response.

If your sensation seems drawn toward a particular somatic practice, explore it. Follow the body's lead, not the mind's agenda. Even a few moments can help your system feel met and supported.

## 6. Add a Cue of Safety.

To complete your check-in, choose a small cue of safety to offer your system (sound, touch, sight, scent, taste, connection, movement, or breath). Let your body register this as a nourishing deposit into your capacity account.

Stick with this exercise for at least seven days before moving on to the next chapter. The goal is presence as you bring this practice into your life in small, meaningful ways that your system can receive.

## Exercise 2

### Saving Capacity: Your Personal Plan

It is easy to read about ways to save capacity and think, *"I should do that."* The harder and more transformative step is to consciously choose where and how you will begin. The following exercise will help you see where you may be leaking capacity.

#### Step 1: Identify Your Hidden Withdrawals

Read through the list below and check any that you've noticed in your own life recently. Add any personal examples that come to mind. You can add specific examples if it feels helpful.

#### Common Hidden Withdrawals:

- Saying "yes" without checking if you have the capacity
- Automatically prioritizing others' needs over your own
- Ignoring your body's "no" signals when your mind says "yes"
- Overcommitting without factoring in your limits
- Not setting boundaries or having self-critical thoughts after setting a boundary
- Spending time on activities not aligned with your current priorities
- Overstimulation from noise, movement, clutter, or constant notifications
- "Just one more thing" tasks that eat into rest or recovery time

## Step 2: Awareness in Action

For each withdrawal you checked above, reflect briefly:

- When does this happen most often? (time of day, type of situation, specific relationships)

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- What is the cost? (energy, focus, mood, physical well-being)

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- What need is this trying to meet? (connection, approval, control, avoiding discomfort)

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### Step 3: Protect Your Capacity

Choose one hidden withdrawal that feels most urgent to address right now.

Complete these prompts:

- The withdrawal I'm choosing to focus on is:

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- A simple change I could make to reduce or pause this is:

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- What support or preparation would make this change easier?

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## Step 4: Practice Your “Capacity Questions”

Before saying yes, committing to something, or taking on a task, ask:

1. Do I have the capacity for this right now?
2. Have I given myself enough of my own capacity lately to say yes without leaving nothing for me?

Post these questions somewhere visible (sticky note, phone reminder) and practice using them this week.

### Exercise 3

### Reflection

- Which cues of safety feel most accessible to you right now?

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- Which ones feel the most nourishing?

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- Where in your day could you naturally weave in more of these deposits?

- What did you notice when you reduced or paused any of your hidden withdrawals?  
How did your energy, mood, or presence change? Did anything surprise you?

# CHAPTER 7

## Balancing Your Capacity Account

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Creating capacity abundance comes down to three main components. In the last chapter, we explored two of them: deposits and withdrawals. You learned ways to replenish your capacity and ways to stop unnecessary spending. Now we turn to the third crucial component, which is balancing your capacity each day so you consistently end the day with something left in your account.

This is where capacity accounting comes in. Capacity accounting is the practice of living within your nervous system's budget.

We will accomplish this by adding another layer to your five times per day check-ins. In addition to noticing your nervous system state, you will begin rating your level of capacity. Don't worry, because capacity and nervous system state are inversely related, it won't take you extra time to determine where your capacity is. Once you know where your capacity stands, you can adjust your plans and expectations for the day accordingly.

This works much like managing your financial budget. Before you go shopping, you need to know how much money is in your account. When funds are low, you spend carefully and protect what you have. Capacity works the same way. When your capacity is running low, the wise choice is to manage your expenditures carefully so you can end the day with resources still available rather than completely depleted.

## How to Determine Your Capacity Levels

As I mentioned above, capacity and nervous system activation move in opposite directions. When your nervous system is calm and regulated, your capacity is naturally higher. As the nervous system moves into fight, flight, or freeze, your capacity shrinks. Your system has less space to think clearly, process information, or respond thoughtfully.

On the scale we will use for this exercise, a 10 represents a system that feels spacious, steady, and resourced. A 1 represents a system that feels completely depleted or overwhelmed.

You do not need to be precise. This exercise is designed to help you notice patterns in your system over time. At first, it may feel like you are guessing, and to some extent, you are. With consistent practice, however, you will become surprisingly skilled at recognizing three things: how much capacity you currently have, how much capacity different life events or responsibilities tend to cost you, and how to modify your life so it fits within your capacity.

The following descriptions may help you estimate where you are in the moment:

### **Capacity 8–10: Plenty of space**

Your system feels relatively calm and steady. Your thinking is clear, and decisions feel manageable. You are able to focus on tasks without much effort and respond thoughtfully to challenges. Your body feels relatively relaxed, and you have the bandwidth to support others without feeling drained.

### **Capacity 5–7: Moderate capacity**

You can still function well, but you may notice that your system is working harder. You might feel slightly scattered, more sensitive to interruptions, or a little impatient. Tasks require more effort to complete, and you may need breaks to stay focused. If additional demands are added here, your system can tip more easily into overwhelm.

### Capacity 3–4: Low capacity

Your system is nearing its limit. You may feel mentally foggy, easily irritated, or overwhelmed by things that normally feel manageable. Small decisions feel harder than they should. You may notice yourself procrastinating, zoning out, or turning to coping habits such as scrolling, caffeine, or sugar to get through the day.

### Capacity 1–2: Very depleted

Your system has very little room left. You may feel exhausted, emotionally reactive, shut down, or unable to think clearly. Even simple tasks may feel too difficult. At this level, the nervous system is primarily focused on survival rather than growth or problem-solving.

Remember that these numbers are not judgments. They are simply information about what your system can currently hold.

As you track both your nervous system state and your capacity level throughout the day, you will begin to see how closely they are connected. When your nervous system rises into survival activation, capacity naturally decreases. When your system feels safe and supported, capacity expands.

## Learning the Early Signs of Low Capacity

At first, you may not recognize the exact moment your capacity begins to drop. Many people only realize their capacity is low after their system has already reached empty. Perhaps you became unusually irritated, shut down emotionally, reached for a coping habit, or felt overwhelmed by something that normally would not bother you.

That is completely normal.

Much of this work is learned through reflection. After a difficult moment or a draining day, take a few minutes to look back and ask yourself a simple question:

*Were there earlier signs that my capacity was running low?*

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Often, there were signals long before things fell apart. Your nervous system is always communicating with you, even if you have learned to ignore its messages.

Some people notice physical signals first. Others notice changes in their thinking, emotions, or behavior. Your system may signal that capacity is getting low in ways such as:

- sighing more than usual
- feeling unusually tired even after sleep
- struggling to make simple decisions
- rereading the same sentence or email several times
- bouncing between tasks without finishing them
- difficulty concentrating or staying present
- feeling unusually sensitive to noise, light, or interruptions
- tension in your jaw, neck, shoulders, or stomach
- headaches or pressure in your head
- tingling in your hands or restlessness in your body
- feeling impatient or snapping at small things
- zoning out or losing track of what you were doing
- reaching for caffeine, sugar, or your phone more often
- feeling a subtle sense of urgency or pressure
- feeling emotionally flat or disengaged
- a heaviness in your body or a desire to withdraw
- trouble falling asleep even though you are exhausted

Your signals may look different from someone else's. What matters most is learning the language of your own body.

Over time, you will begin to recognize the early signals that your capacity is shrinking. That awareness gives you the opportunity to respond sooner, before your system becomes completely depleted.

As you continue your check-ins this week, see if you can identify your earliest three signals that capacity is running low. These will become important markers for you moving forward.

The goal is not to catch every moment perfectly. The goal is simply to become more familiar with how your capacity rises and falls throughout the day so you can care for your system with greater wisdom.

As you practice noticing your nervous system state and your capacity throughout the day, remember that this is simply data collection. You are learning how your system works. Some days, you will notice your capacity dropping quickly. Other days, you may feel surprisingly steady and resourced. Both are useful observations. The goal is not to force your system into a certain state or to judge yourself when capacity is low. The goal is to become familiar with the rhythms of your system so you can begin making choices that support it. As you learn where your capacity tends to rise and fall, you will be better able to protect what you have, make meaningful deposits, and respond wisely when your system begins to run low.

## Exercise 1

### Five Times Per Day Check-ins with Capacity Balancing

The integration for this chapter will deepen your five times per day check-in practice. Now, you'll be adding a new layer: rating your capacity and intentionally planning how to spend it.

Life is full of surprises. If something unexpected drains your energy, you'll need to pivot—either by adjusting your schedule or finding ways to “earn” more capacity dollars through self-care, somatic tools, or nervous system support. The ability to manage your energy without going into capacity debt is the fastest path out of chronic overwhelm.

Here's what your updated check-in practice will look like:

#### **Tune In.**

Close your eyes and bring your awareness inward. Ask yourself, “What’s happening in my body right now?” Notice any internal signals: a tight chest, buzzing in your arms, tension behind your eyes. These physical sensations are your nervous system’s early warning signs and your first doorway into deeper awareness.

## **Feel the Sensations.**

Don't try to fix, analyze, or avoid what you feel. Just allow it to be there. For example, if your stomach feels knotted, simply notice and label it "tight," "tense," or "churning." You don't need to figure it out. The goal is presence. Stay with the sensation for at least a minute.

## **Notice Shifts.**

As you stay with the sensation, watch for subtle changes. Maybe the tightness eases, shifts location, or becomes more defined. Or it might grow more intense before it subsides; that's normal, too. The key is to notice, not judge.

## **Make Friends with the Sensations.**

Imagine these sensations as visitors bringing a message. You don't need to decode it, just offer them kindness. If it helps, give the sensation a name, an image, or a character. Then, have a brief, affirming conversation with it. *"You're welcome here. I'm listening."* This builds emotional safety and internal trust.

## **Ask What Practice the Sensation Wants.**

Once you've made space for the sensation, ask it what it needs. Does it want to move? Shake? Stretch? Choose a somatic practice that resonates and spend a minute or two engaging with it.

## **Choose a Cue of Safety.**

Choose a cue of safety to help deposit capacity into your system. This might be breathwork, a grounding object, gentle touch, a reassuring mantra, or stepping outside for a moment.

## **Rate Your Capacity and Plan Accordingly.**

Using your nervous system cylinder model and the Capacity Scale above, rate your current capacity. Then decide what adjustments, if any, you need to make between now and your next check-in. Remember: you don't want to spend every last drop. Always leave a little in reserve for the unexpected.

## Exercise Two

### Notice the Thought Patterns that Influence Your Capacity

As you move through your check-ins, watch for protective thought patterns (such as the *Should-er*, *Helper*, *Inner Critic*, or others you've noticed). These patterns subtly or dramatically drain your capacity.

Take time once or twice this week to reflect:

- Which thought patterns showed up most often?

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- How did they influence my choices, my energy, and my capacity?

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- What do I notice about how these patterns operate in me?

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There doesn't need to be any judgment here. These patterns were once brilliant adaptations. Now that they no longer serve you, it's time to adapt again. This time toward more wholeness, authenticity, and ease.

Schedule a few I Got You Practice sessions to work with the voices as parts of you that formed to protect you. What do they need to feel safe enough to relinquish control?

### Exercise Three

## Evaluate your Essentials: Are you asking more of your system than it can hold?

After reading the story of Annalise in the chapter, it may be helpful to honestly assess your own life.

Ask yourself:

- What do I currently consider "essential" in my daily or weekly life?

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- Does this load consistently exceed my current capacity?

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- If so, what small steps might I take to lighten the load, even temporarily, so I can begin rebuilding capacity?

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- Am I willing to explore what could be released, simplified, or restructured, even for a season, to support healing and resilience?

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Remember, you are NOT being asked to give up your goals or dreams. You're making the space your system needs to restore and rebuild so you can move toward the life you want with greater strength and sustainability.

Stick with this new check-in rhythm and these reflection practices for at least seven days before moving on to the next chapter.

You are learning a new language—one that honors your body, your energy, and your needs, so don't expect perfection. Yes, I'm talking to the Perfectionist voice. If you find yourself struggling, or if you discover that your essentials exceed your current capacity and you are not sure how to shift, please do not go it alone. We are here to help.

# CHAPTER 8

## Anxiety Thoughts

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In the last chapter, we explored how capacity works like a bank account. You learned how to make deposits, reduce unnecessary withdrawals, and balance your capacity so you can move through life with enough internal resources to think clearly and respond wisely. In this chapter, we will look at one of the biggest ways people unknowingly drain their capacity: anxious thinking. Anxiety is expensive and doesn't offer anything in return.

This does not mean your anxiety is wrong or irrational. Sometimes the concerns that trigger anxious thinking are very real. Health challenges, family struggles, financial stress, and relationship difficulties naturally lead the mind to search for solutions and try to prepare for what might come next. The problem is not that the mind worries about hard things. The problem is how easily anxious thinking turns into endless loops that drain your capacity without leading to clarity or meaningful action.

In the pages ahead, you will learn how to recognize when anxious thinking is costing you capacity and how to shift toward presence, acceptance, and values-based action instead. The goal is not to ignore difficult thoughts or pretend life is easier than it is. The goal is to reclaim the capacity that anxiety quietly steals so you have more energy available for resilience, wise decisions, and the life you are working to create.

This is the first integration exercise that won't necessarily take place during your five times per day check-ins. The reason for that is that you never know when anxiety thinking will strike, and that's when you'll need to apply the four-step process outlined in the book's Chapter 8.

That doesn't mean you're done with your five times per day check-ins. No way! These check-ins are your golden ticket to moving out of survival mode. They will get easier and shorter with practice, but we'll never be done with them. I've been checking in for well over a decade, and not only do I find it easy, but I also hope I never feel done with them. They are my lifeline to my wise, resourced, gracious, and powerful self. I can't imagine not needing them.

Your check-ins also support your thought work because if your body doesn't feel safe, you won't be able to challenge your anxiety thoughts. Remember, your anxiety thoughts are attempting to keep you safe. If there is any hope of softening them, it will be from a place of somatic safety. The mind-body connection is always at play, which is why we work on both at the same time. Stay consistent with your nervous system support because change depends on it.

The integration practice for this chapter is to notice anxiety thinking creeping in and meet it with the following four steps:

## 1. Awareness of the Anxiety Thought:

Name it. Sometimes, it will show up in your body before your mind. Watch for tension, an upset stomach, or other physical sensations. *"Oh, there's that thought that I have to know exactly how I'm going to get out of financial debt before I can feel calm."* *"Oh, there's that thought that my boyfriend/girlfriend/husband/wife doesn't really love me."* *"Oh, here's that thought that I haven't done enough today to be considered worthy."* Revisit the book's Chapter 8 for the various types of anxiety thinking that are most common.

## 2. Stop the Thought:

Use your voice and a hand gesture to stop the thought and meet it with compassion. Promise to revisit it later (and do). *"I hear you. I know you mean well, but I can't go down that path right now. My attention is needed elsewhere. I promise I will come back to this later when I am more resourced."*

Note: If the thought won't yield, revisit the distraction techniques mentioned in the book's Chapter 8.

- **Peripheral Awareness:** Fix your gaze on one object in front of you and softly notice everything in your peripheral vision.
- **Rainbow Colors:** Visualize each color of the rainbow. Then scan your space and name something around you in each color. Bonus points if you can feel into each color's vibration as you go. In case you've forgotten, you can use Roy G. Biv as a mnemonic device for the colors of the rainbow.
- **Kinesthetic Anchor:** Recall the last time you felt calm, safe, or peaceful. Close your eyes and return to that moment. Where were you? Bring the scene to life. Feel it in your body. Let it ground you.
- **Cross-Body Tapping:** Cross your arms in front of your chest and tap your opposite shoulders gently with your fingertips.

### 3. Come Back to the Body:

Take a couple of deep breaths and tune in to your body sensations.

Bring your attention to your feet. Feel them flat on the floor.

Notice your breath traveling into your calves, knees, thighs, hips, belly, arms, hands, heart, face, and head.

As you do this, notice any sensations.

Offer support to that area of your body. You could use your hands, a pillow, or another tool that feels right for the moment. Perform the somatic exercise that feels most helpful. Stay with each sensation as long as it feels appropriate. Linger with your body.

If you find the sensations in your body are too intense, note what the sensation is and switch to the distraction techniques, another practice, or engage in movement for a few minutes. Try shaking, waving your arms, or going for a short walk to see if you can metabolize some of the energy. Take notes so you can gather more information about what you are experiencing and what proves to be helpful.

## 4. Congratulate Yourself:

Don't judge the experience based on performance. Just appreciate yourself for making the effort. The old you would've let that thought spiral for hours, but now you are choosing something different. That deserves recognition, and your brain needs the reward to wire in this new pattern. Celebrate the win.

### A Final Note

I know that stopping every time you feel your anxiety rising can feel like a lot, and frankly, it is. At first, you might feel like you're constantly interrupting your life to notice, stop, reembody, and celebrate. I get it, and I know that this is a big commitment. But what else would you be doing that is more important than building your freedom, clarity, and peace? Please take a moment to answer this question truthfully. What could be more important than that? I know a lot of things could *seem* like more of a priority in the moment, but your Expansive Self knows better. It knows that there is nothing more valuable than the work that will set you free.

You have a couple of choices here. You can spend a few months working through this process and come out on the other side freer, more grounded, and more *you*, or you can keep watching the years pass, stuck in the same painful cycles.

You are worth your time and effort.

Remember, you're carving a new path and that takes time, but it's what leads to your Expansive Self. There is no way that you can build safety and capacity if anxiety and stress-thinking are running your life. I invite you not to judge this process until you've given it at least 100 tries. Then evaluate: "*Is this working for me?*"

If you need additional support, we've got you. Visit my website for the latest offerings of group courses, 1-to-1 options or workshops.

# CHAPTER 9

## Cellular Energy

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Your body is not just where you live. It is the power source for every change you want to make. When physical energy is low, you are essentially incapable of meaningful change because your thoughts, body, and nervous system are all locked in adapted ways of being. You may know exactly what you would like to do and what would help, feel inspired in brief moments, and still be unable to follow through. This kind of stuckness is not laziness or lack of discipline. It is a sign that your cells are depleted. As you read in the book's Chapter 9, when the mitochondria of your cells detect threat, they shift into survival states that conserve energy for protection rather than growth, connection, or creativity. The result can look like anxiety, brain fog, exhaustion, numbness, or shutdown. Your body is not refusing to cooperate. It is doing what it was designed to do under threat.

Immobilization and shutdown are not choices. They are biological survival reflexes that once helped you endure overwhelming circumstances. Like a flower closing during a storm, your system protects itself by pulling inward and conserving resources. The difficulty is that your system does not always reopen automatically once the danger has passed. Healing requires more than insight or time. It requires safety, nourishment, and gentle support so the system can reengage with life again. Until energy is restored, pushing harder will cause more depletion rather than forward movement.

Like so many others, you may have been living for years in a low-battery state, watching your world shrink as everyday tasks become overwhelming and joy feels distant or flat. This common experience can bring profound frustration, shame, and loneliness, yet it is far more

common than most realize. Your Expansive Self does not emerge through willpower alone. It requires a body that has enough fuel to hold the life you want.

This chapter marks the beginning of our third pillar: energy. Treat the integration exercises with reverence because they are your opportunity to restore cellular energy and support your mitochondria in coming back online. These practices may seem simple, yet they are foundational. When your cells have the fuel they need, everything else becomes more possible, including focus, follow-through, emotional resilience, and meaningful change.

You may have been telling yourself that low energy is simply a consequence of getting older. While energy can shift with age, many people discover that what they assumed was aging was actually prolonged shutdown. I often hear clients say things like, *"I feel better than I did twenty years ago. I thought my exhaustion was age, but it was depletion. I wish I had done this sooner, yet I am so grateful to feel like myself again."* When cellular energy returns, the effort required for everyday life decreases, and actions that once felt impossible begin to feel natural. Change stops feeling like a constant uphill battle and starts to unfold as a natural consequence of feeling energetic.

## Exercise One

### Your Daily Check-ins

You will be offered integration practices for the energy restoration protocols in the chapters ahead. However, your five-times-a-day check-ins, capacity accounting, I Got You Practice, and anxiety thought redirection remain essential daily commitments. These are not optional extras or preliminary exercises you outgrow. They are the steady, supportive threads that hold your transformation together and allow everything else you learn to take root in real life. I still incorporate these anchors into my every day.

Think of your growth as a sacred teepee supported by three strong poles: Safety, Capacity, and Energy. Without any one of these, the structure cannot stand. With all three in place, you create a stable, grounded shelter where your Expansive Self can emerge and live in the world. Every check-in, every compassionate response to your thoughts, and every act of nourishment strengthens that structure and increases its ability to hold the life you are building.

If you feel unsure, overwhelmed, or notice that you do not have the capacity to move forward into the energy practices in this section, give yourself permission to pause and return to the earlier material that will support you most right now. This work is not a race to complete a book or check boxes on a list. It is a gradual return to yourself. Whatever helps you stay engaged, resourced, and steady in the process is time well spent.

## Exercise Two

### What's Standing in the Way of Nourishment?

The second integration suggestion for this chapter has to do with your underlying belief system regarding self-care. Now that you understand the importance of energy in your healing, it's time to turn inward and get curious: What might be holding you back from taking care of yourself?

Is there a part of you, perhaps hidden deep below the surface, that feels undeserving of care? Maybe you were taught, directly or subtly, that your needs weren't as important as others. Or that prioritizing yourself is selfish, indulgent, or even unsafe.

These beliefs often form in childhood, long before we have the words to name them. You may not have consciously decided that you don't matter, but your Survival Brain, adapting to your environment, might have come to that conclusion for you, like Nina, who sensed that *matter*ing wasn't an option.

Take a moment here to reflect on your own story:

- Where might you have learned that your needs aren't important?

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- Are there parts of you that still feel that way? (Maybe subconsciously)?

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- What comes up when you think about consistently nourishing and caring for yourself?

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- Schedule time to be with the part of you that may struggle with self-care in an I Got You session. Your Sacred Self knows what is true about your worthiness of care. What are the messages of the Sacred Self about whether or not you are worthy of care?

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This is where integration begins, not with a list of protocols, but with an invitation to rebuild the foundation of self-worth that makes healing possible. Because until you believe you're worth caring for, it will be hard to sustain the practices that allow your energy and your Expansive Self to thrive.

### Exercise 3

## Am I in the Cell Danger Response?

Signs You Might Be Stuck in the CDR. Check the boxes that match your frequent experience.

#### *Mental and Emotional*

Brain fog or slow thinking

Anxiety, depression, or mood swings

- Feeling emotionally flat or fragile
- Inability to reframe or see other perspectives

*Physical*

- Fatigue that does not improve with rest
- Chronic inflammation or pain
- Digestive issues like bloating, constipation, or IBS
- Sensitivity to foods, chemicals, or stress
- Feeling wired but exhausted

*Nervous System / Trauma*

- Easily overstimulated or overwhelmed
- Trouble sleeping or staying asleep
- Feeling stuck in freeze, fight, or fawn responses
- Heightened startle reflex

## The Takeaway

Checking more than a few of the boxes above indicates that you may be experiencing Cell Danger Response. Your struggles are not proof of weakness or failure. They are evidence of your body's wisdom trying to protect you.

The key to moving forward is not to push harder but to restore. In the upcoming modules, you'll learn to replenish energy by focusing on six key areas: sleep, nourishment, movement, hydration, targeted supplementation, and lowering exposure to toxins. The goal is to create the conditions under which your mitochondria can shift from protection to expansion.

Finally, set aside some time this week to journal about the ways you may have been pushing or criticizing yourself when you didn't have the energy to do more. What would it look like to spend the next few months creating the conditions you need to rise?

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When you do, you may find yourself growing and blossoming without the push and hustle you've grown accustomed to. I often tell people, It's like you are a precious seed, yet you've put yourself in a tiny clay pot with a bit of sand, placed it in a dark closet, and expected yourself to thrive.

Accessing your Expansive Self requires certain conditions. The next several chapters will show you how to create them.

# CHAPTER 10

## The Ladder Approach to Progress

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### Exercise One

#### Your Daily Check-ins

As always, your integration includes your five times per day check-ins with capacity accounting and anxiety thought redirection, which will never become redundant. You deserve the love, support, and guidance these practices offer.

### Exercise Two

#### The True Barriers to Lasting Change

As you reflect on past attempts to make lasting changes, it's important to recognize that the true barriers often come from not anticipating the challenges that are likely to throw you off course. It's easy to make a plan, but what trips us up is failing to plan for the situations that are bound to arise, the stress, time constraints, or unexpected events that can derail our best intentions.

It's not that you don't have willpower or that you aren't committed. It's often that you didn't plan for the times when life would get in the way. Just telling yourself to "*do better*" isn't supportive and won't lead to sustainable change. Instead, be proactive and set yourself up for success by identifying what could throw you off course and coming up with practical solutions to overcome those obstacles.

For example, you commit to eating more home-cooked meals, but end up grabbing fast food because you got stuck at work, are starving, depleted, and didn't plan. The barrier here wasn't your lack of willpower; it was not having a plan for when hunger hits, and you're too busy or too tired to cook at home.

Your plan could be to pack food the night before, or keep healthy, easy-to-grab options in your car or office (think nuts, fruit, or grass-fed jerky). If you're stuck and hungry, a grocery store stop for things like rotisserie chicken or a salad is a healthier alternative to the drive-through. If you know your backup plan, your follow-through will be easier.

What if you promise to start exercising in the morning, but you snooze your alarm? The barrier wasn't that you didn't want to work out or that you're lazy; it was the morning struggle to get out of bed.

In this case, you could start by moving your bedtime earlier—just 15 minutes every few days until you're getting enough rest to be able to get up and move. Also, consider starting with something small and simple, like stretching or a short walk. Make it easy enough that your sleepy brain can say yes.

As another example, say you aim to drink more water throughout the day, but forget because you're absorbed in work or meetings. The barrier is that your brain doesn't remember to hydrate amidst the busyness. You could keep a water bottle at your desk and set hourly reminders on your phone or computer. With a little consistency, drinking water can become part of your routine, not an afterthought.

Let's say you want to stop snacking mindlessly in the evening, but you find yourself reaching for chips in the pantry, once again. Instead of telling yourself that you shouldn't do that anymore and to do better, recognize that you are probably reaching for the chips to meet a need. Food is often the most familiar, accessible way you know to meet many needs. The answer is to get curious first. Ask yourself: "What do I want this food to do for me?"

- **If you're trying to destress:**

Your body might be asking for relief. Try stepping outside for fresh air, doing a few minutes of deep breathing, or putting on calming music and stretching out on the floor.

- **If you're seeking entertainment or distraction:**  
You might need stimulation after a long day. Watch a favorite show, doodle, play a quick game, or call someone who lifts your mood.
- **If you're craving comfort or reward:**  
This is about soothing. Wrap up in a blanket, make a cozy cup of tea, light a candle, or spend a few minutes with something that brings you joy.

Sometimes, the need runs even deeper. Emotional eating often shows up when there's an unmet emotional or nervous system need, like connection, rest, validation, or safety. If food has become your go-to coping mechanism, you're not alone, and you don't have to figure it out by yourself. I'll share more about this challenge a little later in the book.

In each of the scenarios shared above, the barrier wasn't a lack of motivation or willpower; it was understanding or planning for the inevitable hurdles. Success requires you to understand your behavior and provide what you need to follow through. The answer is never to merely tell yourself what you should or shouldn't be doing.

Take some time to think about what has tripped you up in the past as you tried to make changes to support your health. What real-life obstacles kept you from following through on your intentions? How can you plan for those moments *now* so you're ready to make different choices, even when things get tough?

### Exercise 3

## Somatic Practice: Meet Your Future Self

Find a quiet space where you can sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes and take a few slow, steady breaths. Feel the support beneath you. Let your body know it is safe to soften, even just a little. Allow 10-15 minutes or more for the following visualization exercise.

Imagine yourself one year from now. This version of you has done the work. They've been showing up, tending to their body, honoring their nervous system, and creating the life they were always meant to live.

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Visualize them clearly. Where are you? How do you carry yourself? What are you wearing? What does your daily life look like? Notice the expression on your face, and the energy in your body.

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What is the sensation in your body? Focus on that area of the body. Does it have a color? Shape? Sound? Bring the sensation to life and sit with it for a while.

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Let this version of you speak to you. What do they want you to know? What wisdom do they have? What did they learn along the way?

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When you're ready, open your eyes and begin writing.

Journal Prompts:

- What did your future self show you or say to you?

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- How is their life different from yours now?

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- What matters most to them?

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- What would it mean to me to become that version of yourself?

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- Why is this change worth showing up for, even when it's uncomfortable?

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- What will I gain, feel, or remember by staying connected to my *why*?

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Let your words guide you back to what matters when things get hard. This is the anchor of your why.

## Exercise Four

### Know Your Worth

Many people don't struggle to be consistent in healthy habits because they don't know what to do. They struggle because of old survival beliefs about their worth, safety, or permission to receive care, or because they don't yet know how to create a plan that truly fits their capacity and energy.

The belief that you don't have time to take care of yourself is often a hidden way of saying that you don't matter enough to be included in your own life. If you have built your days around meeting everyone else's needs, carrying responsibilities, and pushing through exhaustion, that belief can start to feel true. A life organized around everything except your health and well-being will naturally leave no room for you. That structure did not appear by accident. It was shaped over time by adaptations that taught you to prioritize survival, approval, or stability over your own needs.

You do not have to change everything overnight. The goal right now is simply to begin from a different premise: that you deserve a life in which you are a priority, not an afterthought. When you start there, even small adjustments become meaningful. A few minutes of rest, nourishment, or support are not selfish or optional; they are acts of reclaiming your place in your own life.

This week, notice what surfaces when you consider implementing the protocols that will come in the next chapters. Pay attention to the thoughts, emotions, or resistance that arise. They are not signs that you are failing. They are clues about the beliefs and patterns that have been running the show, and they will help you understand what kind of support you need to move forward.

You began this exploration in the integration for the last chapter, and here, we'll go a little deeper.

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Reflection Prompts:

- When I think about prioritizing my own care, what thoughts or feelings come up?

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- Do I ever feel selfish, guilty, or undeserving when I meet my needs?

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- Where might those beliefs have started? Can I trace them back to childhood messages or early experiences?

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- What happens in my body when I imagine consistently giving myself what I need?

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You do not need to “fix” anything right now. Simply notice because awareness is the first step to change.

When you notice a belief like “My needs don’t matter” or “It’s selfish to care for myself,” practice a neutral reframe that moves you one step closer to truth.

Examples:

- From: “I don’t deserve this.”  
To: “I am open to exploring what it feels like to care for myself.”
- From: “It’s selfish to put myself first.”  
To: “Taking care of myself gives me more to share with others.”
- From: “I don’t have time for this.”  
To: “Small acts of care are possible, even in busy days.”

Reflection Prompt:

- What gentle reframe feels believable and supportive to me right now?

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# CHAPTERS 11-17

## Building Energy One Step at a Time

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In the previous chapters, we began exploring the third element required to move out of survival mode: energy. Whether you are struggling daily with the energy to get through your normal activities or you feel that your energy is adequate, there is likely more available to you. Most people tell me, *“I didn’t realize how depleted I was until my energy improved. I didn’t even know what I was missing.”*

As you have now learned, years of experiences that overwhelmed your nervous system, combined with constantly pushing past your capacity, have depleted your energy stores. As a result, your cells may no longer be optimized for energy production, but this can change starting today. Little by little, you can implement the protocols in this section to replenish your inner resources at the cellular level.

Remember that restoring energy isn’t only about having the stamina to do what you want. Energy is also required to think differently. Trust me when I tell you that diligently applying the protocols in the next several chapters could unlock your hidden potential. Perhaps not immediately, yet within a relatively short period of time, you will begin to feel a difference.

There is no need to get overwhelmed with the significant volume of material in this section. It is indeed a lot. However, I have created a method that allows you to move forward at a pace your system can tolerate. How can I be so sure it will work for you? It’s created by you and for you.

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I've taken each of the nine areas we'll explore in the next chapters and created ten ladder rungs for implementing each one. However, you are in complete control over how you climb. You can break it down into as many micro-steps as you need, and you get to decide how long you stay on each rung of the ladder. Every seven days, you will review your data, decide what worked or didn't work, and choose your next step. The nine areas we'll be focusing on are as follows:

- Sleep
- Protein
- Healthy fats
- Fiber
- Sugar
- Hyper-processed foods
- Movement
- Hydration and supplementation
- Reducing toxic load

Each of these areas is represented by a ten-rung ladder. That means there are ninety potential rungs available across all of the ladders in this section.

The purpose of the ladders is not to rush to the top. The purpose is to help you find the next step that is possible from where you are right now.

Every seven days, you will look at the ladders and choose the rung (or rungs) that is your realistic next move. Some weeks that may mean advancing one rung on a single ladder. Some weeks you may stay put on the rung you're working on. Other weeks you may choose to take small steps across several ladders. The only guideline is that the step should feel easy enough that your system does not experience it as a threat.

The most important point to remember is: This is not a race.

When people first see the ladders, it's common for a part within them to immediately start calculating how long it will take to reach the top. That part may insist you should move faster or do more at once. While this part is natural and only trying to help you reach your goals faster, it's also the part that has sabotaged your efforts in the past by causing you to take on too much at a time. You already have the tools to work with that part of you through your

nervous system practices and the I Got You practice. It's very important not to push past resistant parts but to get them on board.

These ladders are not meant to override the nervous system work. They are meant to support it.

One of the most helpful practices I discovered while using and teaching this method is to print the ladders and display them somewhere in your home where you can see them regularly. There is something powerful about seeing progress and understanding where you are, rather than telling yourself you should be doing better in these areas. When the ladders are visible, you always know where you are and how to take the next step. Being able to see the journey laid out and where you are within it reminds me of the navigation systems many airplanes use today.

When you board a plane, you can sometimes open the flight map on the screen in front of you. At the beginning of the flight, the plane sits at the departure city. As the journey unfolds, the map shows the plane slowly traveling across the route toward its destination.

Every time I check that screen, I see exactly where we are and how far we have come.

There are moments during a long flight when it feels like you might be stuck in that seat forever. Around that time, you may start wondering if the plane is even moving. Then you look at the map again and realize you are halfway across the country. Progress has been happening the entire time.

The ladders serve a similar purpose. They help you see where you started, where you are now, and where you are headed. Even when the movement is gradual, you can see the journey unfolding.

Over the next few chapters, you will find detailed guidance for each ladder, along with practical tools to help you move through them in ways that fit your real life. For example, when we explore the food ladders, you will also see the meal planning and preparation system that has helped me make these changes manageable.

The bottom line is this: experiment with the process. You do not need to tackle everything at once. You can choose to work on one rung from one ladder and stay there for a month or

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longer if that's what your system can handle. The only requirement for restoring energy is consistency over time.

If you need to break any of the rungs down into smaller goals, absolutely do that. The suggestions are simply a starting point you can use to make the climb easier, not something you must master on day one.

The process is the same as what we discussed in Chapter 10. Choose a rung. Practice it for a week. Let your system adjust. Then evaluate data in your CEO time and choose the next step that feels possible. That next step may be dialing it back, staying the same, moving forward on the same ladder, or adding a rung from one of the other ladders.

There are many options. You can work on one ladder at a time or combine two or three ladders if that feels right. You can take each rung as written or break them into smaller components whenever you need to.

The offered ladder rungs do not take away your flexibility. They simply give you a jumping-off point that can support your week-to-week progress.

The exact step and timing are entirely in your hands.

Notice how this approach is different than what you've tried in the past. You are not forcing change through willpower. You are building the conditions that allow your body to regain the energy it has been missing.

The following sleep ladder is meant to take you from where you are today to more optimal sleep. You can break down any of the rungs into smaller components. You can take more than one rung at a time, or you can work on one or more other ladders simultaneously. For example, over the next seven days, you can take the first rung of your sleep ladder as well as the first rung on your protein ladder or any other combination that suits you.

Keep in mind that your commitment should feel manageable and meaningful, not difficult. Refresh your memory of the five-step, seven-day method to help you choose your ladder rungs most effectively.

# CHAPTER 11

## The Sleep Ladder: 10 Rungs to Better Rest

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Also, remember that your weekly CEO time is a crucial aspect of your success. You don't have to move up a rung every week, but you do need to review your data and use it to set up the best plan for your next seven days. Keep coming back to your CEO time, even if you did nothing toward your rung. It's your chance to reset.

As you work with the following rungs over time, keep in mind each one is discussed in more detail within the chapter on sleep. You can refer back to the information as often as helpful.

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### **Rung 1: Track and Set a Consistent Sleep Schedule**

Begin tracking your sleep using the following log or a tracking device such as Oura, Whoop strap, Fitbit, Apple Watch, Garmin or another device. You certainly **DO NOT** need to go out and buy an expensive device. I'm mentioning it because for some, it makes a difference to have measurable and objective data every morning about how they slept and what makes a difference. I've prepared a log that you can print out and use at the very end of the chapter. It has the following data:

## Weekly Sleep Log

Date	Bedtime	Wake Time	Total Hours Slept	Night Wakings (#/duration)	Morning Energy (1-5)	Mood on Waking	Notes/Reflections

Pair your tracking with the first behavior change: committing to a consistent bedtime and wake time, even on weekends. This one shift strengthens your circadian rhythm, which is the internal clock that governs when you feel alert and when you feel sleepy.

If you currently have unpredictable patterns, give yourself patience as you reset. Start by noticing your current bedtimes and wake times, and choose a target that feels realistic. It may take a week or two for your body to adjust.

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### Rung 2: Prepare Your Room for Sleep

This rung invites you to optimize your environment for rest. Make your room dark, cool, and quiet. Add blackout curtains or an eye mask, lower the thermostat, and reduce noise with earplugs or a white noise machine.

Darkness signals the brain to release melatonin, the hormone that tells your body it is time to rest. A cool environment lowers core body temperature, which supports the natural drop needed for deep sleep. Quiet calms the nervous system so it can settle into slower brain waves.

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### Rung 3: Creating Boundaries Free of Tails and Tiny Feet

For children old enough, this may mean establishing a consistent bedtime routine and helping them learn to self-soothe. A predictable rhythm signals safety to their nervous system as well as yours. With younger children, even small adjustments, such as moving a last snack earlier, dimming the lights, or creating a calming wind-down ritual, can reduce wake-ups. With older kids, setting expectations around bedtime and wake time helps everyone align to a rhythm that supports the whole household.

Pets are a source of disrupted sleep. As much as we love them, a dog moving in the bed or a cat prowling at 3 a.m. can keep the nervous system from dropping into the deep stages of rest. Consider where pets can have their own sleeping space, or whether simple changes, like a late-night bathroom break for a dog or timed feeders for a cat, can minimize interruptions.

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## Rung 4: Build a Wind-Down Routine

This week (or however long it takes you to get steady on this rung), your goal is to commit to a simple, repeatable sequence that tells your nervous system: the day is complete, it is safe to release, and rest is here. Over time, this becomes a signal of safety that your whole system learns to trust.

Your routine does not need to be long or complicated. What matters most is consistency. Choose a series of simple steps that, when repeated, create an association in your body and brain that bedtime is coming. Examples include:

- **Dimming lights** at least an hour before bed to trigger melatonin release.
- **Gentle movement or stretching** to signal to your muscles that it is time to release tension.
- **Listening to soft music, nature sounds, or calming frequencies** that downshift your nervous system.
- **Reading something nourishing** (avoid screens).
- **Journaling** to clear lingering thoughts from your mind.
- **Breath practices or somatic grounding** exercises to settle your system.
- **Taking a hot bath**
- **Light massage**

It can also be helpful to pair sensory cues with your ritual: the smell of lavender, the feel of a soft blanket, or the taste of a non-caffeinated herbal tea. Over time, your body begins to associate these sensations with rest.

Be willing to experiment and find what helps you feel most safe and relaxed. Your wind-down routine should feel supportive, not like another task on the to-do list. Even fifteen minutes of intentional slowing can make a profound difference.

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## **Rung 5: Reduce Light and Screen Exposure at Night**

An hour before bed, dim your lights and put screens away. Blue light from phones, tablets, computers, and even bright household lighting signals to your brain that it is still daytime. It suppresses melatonin, the hormone that helps you fall asleep, and keeps your nervous system in “alert” mode when it should be preparing for rest. The result is difficulty falling asleep, shallow rest, or waking in the night.

Furthermore, the content on our screens, emails, social media, shows, news, and games keeps the brain in a heightened state of stimulation. Phones and computers are engineered to pull us in and activate dopamine pathways, making it hard to disengage. That stimulation tells your nervous system that there’s more to do, more to respond to, and more to solve. Instead of moving toward the safety and stillness needed for sleep, your body stays in a low-level state of vigilance.

Replace screens with calming alternatives that still give your nervous system what it needs. Your nighttime routine from the previous ladder rung can support this effort.

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## **Rung 6: Anchor Your Day to Improve Your Night**

Deep, restorative sleep is not created only in the hour before bed. It begins the moment you wake up. Your nervous system relies on consistent daily cues, light, movement, and rhythm to regulate your circadian clock. When those cues are missing or inconsistent, sleep at night becomes fragmented or shallow. When they are steady, your body knows exactly when to be alert and when to release into rest.

The most powerful anchor for your system is morning light. Within the first hour of waking, step outside and expose your eyes to natural sunlight, even if it is cloudy. Morning light resets your circadian rhythm, tells your brain to increase cortisol for daytime energy, and sets the timer for melatonin to rise about 14–16 hours later.

Morning movement is another key anchor. A few minutes of walking, stretching, or gentle exercise in the morning signals to your body that the day has begun. It increases energy, improves metabolism, and helps your system distinguish between “day mode” and “night mode.”

Eating patterns also shape your body’s clock. Aim to eat your first meal within a couple of hours of waking and keep mealtimes consistent. Large swings in timing confuse your system. Stable rhythms in eating tell your body when to expect fuel, which in turn helps it know when to rest.

These daytime anchors of light, movement, and nutrition help to send signals of safety and predictability to your nervous system.

To implement this rung, create morning and daytime anchors that make sleep easier at night. Try:

- Stepping outside for 5–10 minutes of morning light within an hour of waking.
- Adding gentle movement in the morning to signal energy and presence.
- Eating meals at consistent times to reinforce circadian rhythm.

Think of it as bookending your days: start with cues that say “it is time to be awake” and end with cues that say “it is safe to rest.”

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## Rung 7: Adjust Food, Drink, and Evening Habits

The choices you make in the hours before bedtime have a powerful influence on how well you sleep. What you eat, drink, and do in the evening can either support your nervous system in shifting toward rest or keep it stimulated and alert long after you lie down. By creating a gentle buffer between the day’s activity and the night’s restoration, you send a clear message of safety and rhythm to your body.

Aim to finish dinner at least three hours before bed. Large or heavy meals too close to bedtime can keep your digestive system working hard when the rest of your body wants to settle. A full stomach can raise core temperature, disrupt melatonin release, and lead to restless sleep.

If you truly need something before bed, choose a light, balanced snack, such as a small piece of fruit with nut butter or a few slices of turkey, rather than sugary or processed foods.

Stimulants and substances matter too. Caffeine can remain active in your system for six to eight hours. Even if you fall asleep after an evening coffee, the quality of your rest will be lighter and less restorative. Alcohol may make you drowsy at first, but it fragments sleep, reduces time spent in REM, and disrupts deep rest. Sugar spikes blood glucose, which often leads to a crash in the night and sudden wake-ups. Each of these interferes with the natural downshift your nervous system needs.

Activity levels play a role. Regular exercise is one of the best supports for healthy sleep, yet the timing is important. Vigorous workouts too close to bedtime raise cortisol, elevate core temperature, and keep the nervous system activated. For most people, finishing strenuous activity at least three hours before sleep allows the body to transition smoothly. Gentle stretching, yoga, or restorative movement in the evening is more supportive at this stage of the day.

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## Rung 8: Explore Gentle Sleep Supports

Sometimes, even with consistent routines, your body may need a little extra support in learning how to rest. Gentle, natural sleep aids can be helpful tools, not as replacements for healthy rhythms, but as companions that give your nervous system a nudge in the right direction.

Herbal teas such as chamomile, passionflower, or valerian root have long been used to calm the nervous system. Sipping a warm cup before bed can become part of your wind-down ritual, offering both physiological support and a comforting sensory cue that it is time to release into rest.

Magnesium plays an essential role in relaxation, muscle release, and nervous system regulation. Some people also find benefit in magnesium baths or topical sprays. I love the nighttime magnesium drink called *Calm*.

Melatonin is the body's natural sleep hormone. Supplemental melatonin can help in specific situations—such as adjusting after travel, resetting a disrupted sleep schedule, or supporting short-term insomnia. It is most effective in small doses, usually much lower than what is

commonly sold over-the-counter. The key is to use it thoughtfully, as a reset rather than a nightly crutch.

If you choose to try any supplement or aid, check with your healthcare provider first, especially if you take medications or have health conditions.

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## Rung 9: Process Emotions and Support the Nervous System

Sleep is not only a biological rhythm; it is also an emotional process. During the day, stress hormones and activity can hold difficult feelings at bay. When the world quiets at night, those same feelings often surface. This is why many people notice that grief, anxiety, or unresolved conflict seem louder when the lights go out. If your nervous system is holding unprocessed emotions, it will have a harder time feeling safe enough to release into rest.

Your body does not separate mind from emotions. Stress, fear, or sadness show up physically—as a racing heart, a knot in the stomach, or tension in the chest. When these sensations are ignored during the day, they often wake you at night in the form of restlessness, vivid dreams, or sudden wake-ups at 2 a.m. Supporting your nervous system means creating a safe space for emotions to move rather than forcing them down.

With this rung, begin experimenting with small ways to process emotions before nightfall. That may look like:

- Journaling for ten minutes in the afternoon or evening.
- Using somatic practices such as orienting, breath awareness, or gentle movement to give your body a sense of completion.
- Setting aside space to grieve or feel sadness, instead of pushing it away.
- Getting support if you don't know how to access the repressed feelings or don't know what to do with them once you find them. Visit [LoriMontry.com](https://LoriMontry.com) for support options.

At night, if strong emotions do surface, resist the urge to battle them. Instead, use gentle somatic practices to signal safety to your nervous system. Place a hand on your heart, breathe

slowly, or allow your body to move in whatever way brings comfort. Remind yourself that emotions are not threats; they are signals asking for care.

The goal is not to eliminate feelings but to create enough safety in your body that emotions can be felt without overwhelming you. Make space for them during the day when you are more resourced and find support to help you. When your nervous system learns that feelings can be processed and released, it does not have to wake you in the night to get your attention.

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## Rung 10: Seek Professional Guidance if Needed

If you have been practicing these steps consistently and your sleep is still not improving, it may be time to bring in professional support. This does not mean you have failed. It means your body may be carrying a deeper imbalance that needs more specific care. Sleep is influenced by many factors, such as hormones, breathing patterns, and even hidden medical conditions. Sometimes the nervous system cannot fully settle without extra help.

When people struggle with sleep, the first suggestion they often hear is to try a sleep aid. While medication or supplements have their place, they should not be the first or only step. Sleep aids can sometimes mask symptoms or even make them worse without addressing the root cause. The deeper question is always: *Why is my system not able to rest?*

Possible underlying contributors include:

- Sleep apnea or other breathing issues that keep your body from fully resting.
- Hormonal shifts, such as perimenopause or thyroid imbalance.
- Chronic stress or unresolved trauma that leaves the nervous system hypervigilant.
- Nutrient deficiencies, such as low magnesium, B vitamins, or iron.
- Pain conditions that prevent deep rest.

A healthcare provider or sleep specialist can help uncover these layers through testing, conversation, and observation. Addressing the root cause is always more effective than relying on a pill to override your system.

## Ongoing Commitment

These are the rungs of your sleep ladder. I invite you to treat each one of them as essential. If you think your sleep does not need improvement, gently challenge this assumption. Most of us don't know how good it could be until we experience it. Below you'll find a sleep log as well as a cheat sheet for your sleep ladder that you can hang in your space to remind you of what you are climbing toward.

## Sleep Ladder Cheat Sheet

- **Rung 1:** Track and Set a Consistent Sleep Schedule

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- **Rung 2:** Prepare Your Room for Sleep

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- **Rung 3:** Creating Boundaries Free of Tails and Tiny Feet

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- **Rung 4:** Build a Wind-Down Routine

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- **Rung 5:** Reduce Light and Screen Exposure at Night

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- **Rung 6:** Anchor Your Day to Improve Your Night

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- **Rung 7:** Adjust Food, Drink, and Evening Habits

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- **Rung 8:** Explore Gentle Sleep Supports from the Chapter

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- **Rung 9:** Process Emotions and Support the Nervous System

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- **Rung 10:** Seek Professional Guidance if Needed

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# CHAPTER 12

## Creating Your Nourishment Plan

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Chapters 12 and 13 focus on your nutrition for good reason. Nutrition plays a crucial role in restoring energy to your cells. Providing your body with the raw ingredients it needs to thrive and avoiding harmful or unsupportive substances in our modern world isn't easy. If you are anything like me, part of you may feel excited and ready to begin, while another part may be thinking, I don't want to change, or this feels like too much to take on right now.

Let's pause and shift that response into something more curious and supportive. Instead of pushing yourself or giving up before you even begin, try asking: *What would I need in order to take this on? How can I support myself so this feels doable?*

Make no mistake, this will require planning and forethought. In the world we live in, eating in a way that truly supports your health is not easy, but it becomes much more manageable when you approach it with intention rather than pressure.

You also do not have to do this alone. Whether it is a group of friends working toward better health together or one of the *You're Not the Problem* groups, surrounding yourself with people who understand the process and can encourage you along the way makes a meaningful difference.

### Adding Before Subtracting

Chapter 12 offers you three important nutritional pillars your body needs to restore energy. Most people find it easier to start here by *adding* foods that nourish rather than taking foods

away, which is why these pillars are the perfect entry point. It doesn't mean you can't take small steps on the other two ladders (removing sugar and hyper-processed foods) but if you make your primary focus adding in adequate protein, healthy fats, and fiber, your efforts to cut sugar and hyper-processed foods will be easier.

If it feels like a lot to take in, remember your ally in making any change: The five-part, seven-day ladder-building system that never asks more of you than you can give. I've given you five separate ladders with ten rungs each to help you implement the nutrition pillars without overwhelm. That means you may be with this chapter for a little while. Keep in mind that you can break rungs down into smaller rungs wherever the offered rung feels too big for you. Also, remember that while you will check in with your progress every seven days, you don't have to adopt a new rung every seven days. You get to stay put on any rung until it feels steady.

Try hard not to let the voice that says, "*But it's going to take too long!!!!*" drive your efforts. Steady, committed progress will always win over overcommitting. It's ok for it to take as long as it takes. If you are sitting down in your CEO time every seven days and making adjustments (up, down, or steady) according to the data you collect, you will get to the top of your ladder!

## How These Sections Work

This is a dense section of the workbook, but don't worry, because I'm here to make it easier for you to implement. Here's a road map to how I have organized the information.

Over the next pages of the workbook, I'll share with you the following:

- The system that I use for implementing the protocols
- Additional food guidance
- A ladder for each pillar, including:
  - Foods for each ladder
  - Easy meal ideas or add-ons for each pillar
  - Ladder-specific considerations

- Ladder cheat sheet you can print and place where you can see it as you move between ladders and take your steps from week to week.

## Systems Make It Easier

Before you dive into the ladders for nutrition, I want to share a brief snapshot of the system I use that makes healthy eating feel simple and consistent, rather than a daily struggle.

I reassure you that the nutrition guidelines offered here are doable. I have followed them for many years, while also avoiding gluten, corn, and conventional dairy, and I have found that when the right systems are in place, eating in a way that supports your body becomes far more manageable. Although your system can look slightly different, with consistent intention, you too can develop a structure that works for your life. At that point, following the guidelines feels possible, not overwhelming. When the environment and routines support you, healthy choices require far less effort.

## Why Systems Matter

Without a system, I have no idea how I would be able to follow my own advice. I'm not going to just tell you what to eat; I want to offer a way to actually implement it.

Telling yourself day after day, *"Today I'll just figure out three balanced meals plus snacks, find the right ingredients, and cook them, while also handling everything else,"* is exhausting. It is no wonder so many people feel like they are failing when, in reality, the real issue is that they do not yet have a system that makes it simple.

That is why systems matter. They are the difference between waking up every day feeling overwhelmed and waking up knowing exactly how you'll carry out what you want. A good system reduces stress, cuts down on constant decision-making, and eliminates the feeling of starting over from scratch each day. Once your system is in place, following the pillars is no longer a massive daily effort. It becomes part of your routine, something that supports your life rather than competing with it.

## What's the Cost of Not Having a System?

Let's talk about what happens when you don't have a system, because many of you already know this feeling. Without a system, every day can feel like you're starting from zero. You open the fridge and stare, hoping something will jump out at you. You move to the pantry and shuffle things around, trying to piece together something that will keep you full and still align with your health goals. Sometimes you make it work. Sometimes you default to whatever is quick or convenient. Sometimes you skip a meal because nothing seems appealing or clear, and later you are so hungry that you grab whatever is available.

What follows is often frustration and exhaustion, and even doubt about your own discipline. You may find yourself thinking, I should be better at this. I should be more consistent. In reality, you have been trying to do something that is very difficult to sustain without structure.

I have lived this too. There have been periods in the past when I did not use my system, such as when traveling or during an unusually busy season, and I noticed immediately how much harder it became to support my pillars. I was not eating junk food, but I was not eating in a way that truly nourished me either. Meals were thrown together, macros were off, and I could feel the difference: less energy, more cravings, less stability.

That is the cost of not having a system. It does not matter how committed you are. Without structure, the daily demands of life will almost always take precedence. Over time, this can leave you feeling discouraged and stuck in a cycle of trying harder, struggling, and blaming yourself. The issue is not that you do not care. It is that you are attempting to solve a complex, ongoing problem with sheer willpower, and that approach is not sustainable.

What does work is putting a system in place ahead of time so the decisions, planning, and stress are already handled. When it is time to eat, you are not starting from scratch. Your choices are clear, accessible, and supportive of the life you want to build.

## My System – The Big Picture

Here's the big picture of how my system works.

Once a week, usually on Saturday or Sunday, I sit down and decide on three or four dishes I am going to prepare for myself. These are meals I know are nourishing, that I genuinely enjoy eating, and that fit within the pillars I am working on—protein, healthy fats, fiber, and balance. I do not try to reinvent the wheel each week. I choose recipes I know will work and rotate them so I do not get bored. If I had to guess, I would say I have about twenty go-to meals that make up most of my routine, though they rarely feel repetitive because I vary the vegetables and small details each time.

Once I know what I am cooking, I make a simple grocery list and buy everything I need in one trip. There is no daily shopping and no guessing about what might be missing from the pantry. Just a focused list and one errand.

Then I block off a couple of hours on the weekend and another couple of hours midweek to do the actual cooking. I prepare the meals in batches, portion them into glass containers, and place them in the refrigerator so they are ready to go.

That's it. A little planning, a little cooking, and my entire week is set up. When it is time to eat, I do not have to wonder what to make, whether I have the right ingredients, or how quickly I can get something on the table before I am starving. I open the refrigerator, take out a container, heat it, and within minutes, I am eating a balanced meal that supports my pillars. I still cook separately for my family, but having my food taken care of has been the key to consistency.

The beauty of this system is that it removes weight from my daily life. I do not have to make a stream of small decisions every day, and I do not stand in front of the refrigerator hoping for inspiration. I also avoid defaulting to convenience foods that leave me feeling depleted or off track. My system makes healthy eating straightforward because the work has already been done.

I also like to track my food because it reassures me that my goals are being met most days. Since I am typically eating the same few meals in any given week, I take a few extra minutes

while preparing the food to enter the recipes into my tracking app (Cronometer). That way, when it comes time to log my meals each day, I simply select the recipe from my saved list rather than starting from scratch.

This is another example of how systems make things easier. The small amount of effort up front removes the need for daily guesswork and makes tracking quick and manageable instead of time-consuming. It allows me to stay informed about my intake without feeling like I am constantly monitoring or micromanaging my food.

## Meal Planning and Prepping Shortcuts

- When it comes to meals, do not overwhelm yourself. One of the easiest ways to begin is to choose a cookbook or two and pick a few recipes that match your taste, lifestyle, and skill level. This removes the pressure of having to invent meals from scratch and gives you a reliable starting point.
- Three of my favorites are *The Good Energy Cookbook* and *The 30-Minute Good Energy Cookbook* by Linda Holmes, based on the work of Dr. Casey Means, whose bestselling book has helped many people reconnect with nutrition as a foundation for well-being. I also recommend *The Glucose Goddess Cookbook for Beginners* by Alison Schneider, which offers simple, balanced meals designed to stabilize blood sugar and support steady energy.
- A few tips to make this process easier:
  - You do not need to plan every meal right away. Start small. You might begin with planning and prepping only your breakfasts until that feels easy, or just two dinners for the week. You can take time to develop your system over several weeks, even before making significant changes to what you are eating.
  - If you are making a meal you enjoy, double the batch and use the leftovers for lunch or dinner the next day. This single habit can dramatically reduce cooking time and decision fatigue.

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WORKBOOK

- Let go of perfection. Use recipes as guidance rather than rigid instructions. Take shortcuts that support success, such as buying pre-chopped vegetables, using dried herbs instead of fresh, or choosing frozen options when they are more practical. Adjust based on what feels realistic for you right now.
- Keep a short list of meals that work well for you. Over time, this becomes your personal rotation, making planning faster and easier each week.
- Stock your kitchen with a few ultra-practical staples so you can assemble nourishing meals even when time or energy is low. Pre-washed greens, frozen vegetables and fruit, rotisserie chicken, canned beans or fish, pre-cooked grains, and simple sauces or dressings can turn into a balanced meal in minutes without starting from scratch. Smoothies or non-sweetened yogurt bowls with fruit and nuts come in handy in a pinch.
- Grocery shopping can also be streamlined. If you buy the same staple items each week—protein sources, vegetables, healthy fats—you don't have to reinvent the list every time. Keep a master list on your phone or fridge, and just add the few extras you need for that week's recipes.
- Finally, don't underestimate the power of seasoning. Having a variety of spices, sauces, and condiments on hand transforms simple ingredients into meals you actually look forward to. This is especially helpful for those who get bored easily.
- The goal is to make this so doable that it becomes part of your life, not another "program" that you drop after a few weeks. Two anchor meals, smart variety, and a few simple tools—that's all it takes to save yourself hours of stress and keep your nutrition on track.
- Keep in mind that getting your system in place initially is way more work than running it once it is built. Trust that the time you spend in the beginning to establish what works for you will save you time and energy in the long run.

## A Sample Week

That is the big-picture overview. Let me show you what this looks like in real life. I will walk you through one of my recent weeks so you can see how simple it becomes once the system is in place.

This week, I chose three main dishes, and I've included recipes for these at the end of this section. The first was a lentil-based meal. I cooked two cups of lentils in bone broth for extra flavor and nutrients. Once they were tender, I added chopped and sauteed onions, tomatoes, and riced cauliflower (to boost fiber and vegetable intake).

Flavor matters, so I seasoned it with spices I enjoy. I used cumin, garlic powder, salt, and pepper, smoked paprika, and a pinch of turmeric, which works beautifully with lentils and gives the dish a warm, savory flavor.

Separately, I cooked several chicken breasts, cut them into bite-size pieces, and stirred them into the lentil mixture. My preferred method for cooking chicken is very simple. I sear both sides in a pan over medium heat until lightly browned, then cover the pan, reduce the heat to low, and let it cook gently for about 20 minutes (longer if the pieces are thick). This method keeps the chicken moist even when reheated later.

What I love about this meal is that it is balanced without requiring extra thought. The lentils provide plant-based protein and fiber, the chicken adds a clean source of animal protein, and the bone broth contributes flavor and minerals. The onions, tomatoes, and cauliflower increase the vegetable content without making the dish complicated. The seasonings and a drizzle of olive oil provide healthy fats. Sometimes I top it with avocado, cilantro, or parsley for freshness.

I portioned everything into glass containers, and just like that, I had several complete meals ready to go. Each one met my goals for protein, fat, and fiber without measuring or stressing.

The second dish I made was simple roasted vegetables, quinoa, and salmon.

Later in the week, I made a chili using pastured-raised ground turkey, black beans, kidney beans, onion, garlic, tomatoes, roasted and cubed zucchini squash, diced chilies and lots of chili spices. Again, a perfectly balanced meal ready to go whenever I am.

Since I have a few extremely easy breakfast options: protein smoothies, eggs, Greek yogurt with walnuts, seeds and chia, I don't prep my breakfast beforehand.

## Other Ideas

I also love to prep bowls. I will cook a couple of cups of quinoa (a complete plant protein), organic pasture-raised chicken or fish, and then chop red or green onion, baby tomatoes, cucumber, shredded carrots, and serve it all over arugula or spinach mix with dressing that I make with olive oil and lemon or vinegar.

Quinoa (8 grams of protein) and The Only Bean pasta, (44 grams of protein), are two excellent choices to have on hand. Pasture-raised, grass-fed organic meat or wild-caught small seafood and organic vegetables are the biggest contributors to my diet. I also eat beans, lentils, pastured-raised A2 yogurt, clean protein powder, berries, cherries, and green apples.

Soups and stews are also perfect because they heat up so nicely.

## Why It Works

Why does this work so well? It's not just about having food prepped. It's about how much mental energy you save when the decisions are already made for you.

Think about it—every day you make hundreds of small choices. What time to wake up, what to wear, what to prioritize at work, and how to manage your responsibilities at home. Decision-making is one of the biggest drains on your brain, and when it comes to food, it can feel relentless. What should I eat? Do I have the ingredients? Will this actually nourish me? Is it enough protein?

By the time you've asked yourself all those questions, you're already stressed, and often you'll reach for what's easiest in the moment, even if it's not aligned with your goals. That's not because you're lazy or unmotivated—it's because your brain is overloaded.

My system works because it removes that daily burden. The planning, shopping, cooking, and balancing is already done once or twice a week. That means when it's time to eat, you don't need to think. You just grab what's already prepared. It's fast, it's nourishing, and it supports your pillars without asking you to reinvent the wheel every day.

There's another reason it works. Having balanced meals already portioned out stops the cycle of skipping meals, overeating, or relying on convenience foods. You're less likely to hit that point of being "hangry" or so depleted that you'll eat anything in sight. Instead, you're consistently fueling your body in a way that feels steady and safe.

That consistency creates momentum. Once your body knows it can count on you for steady protein, healthy fats, and balanced meals, it stops sending out the emergency alarms. Your nervous system settles, and you feel more in control.

That's the real magic of a system. It doesn't just make food easier—it actually calms your entire body and brain.

## The Emotional Payoff

When you don't have a system, it's easy to fall into cycles of guilt and self-blame. You skip meals, or you grab something that doesn't really support you, and then you beat yourself up. You say things like, "Why can't I get it together? Why do I keep messing this up? What's wrong with me?" Those thoughts are heavy, and they drain you even more.

Now imagine the difference when you have meals ready that you know will nourish you. You open the fridge, and there's no stress. There's no guilt or endless decision-making. You simply grab a meal, eat it, and move on with your day. That one small shift removes so much mental and emotional weight.

You begin to feel more confident and trust yourself. As you watch yourself follow through, you stop doubting your ability to succeed. Instead of your nutrition being a source of stress, it becomes a source of strength.

## Don't Want to Eat the Same Things Every Day?

I don't mind eating the same few things for a week. I know that the following week, I'll have a whole new set of choices, but what if you don't want to eat the same thing every day? That's a fair concern. The answer is variety within simplicity. Instead of cooking seven or more totally different recipes, try this: choose two protein bases for the week, like chicken and salmon, or lentils and eggs. Then mix and match sides, spices, and toppings. For example,

that lentil dish I shared earlier can taste completely different if you top it with avocado one day, feta cheese another, or fresh herbs the next. Small tweaks keep it interesting without doubling your workload.

## Real-Life Flexibility

Now let's talk about real life. Because as much as we love the idea of perfectly prepped meals waiting for us every week, sometimes that just isn't possible. You travel, you have a busy week, or you simply don't have the energy to prep. This is where flexibility comes in.

If you're traveling, for example, you might not have a fridge full of containers, but you can still look for the same balance at restaurants. That could mean ordering grilled chicken with a side of vegetables and asking for sauce on the side. It could mean picking up a protein box at the airport, or pairing a salad with a piece of salmon instead of going straight for the bread or pasta.

If you're on the go and really limited, a high-quality protein powder and shaker bottle can be a lifesaver. You may not be able to cook, but you can still get the protein your body needs to feel stable. Pair that with some nuts or cut vegetables from a grocery store, and you're still honoring your pillars.

Even at home, there will be weeks when you just don't get around to prepping. That doesn't mean you throw in the towel. You can keep a few "back-up" foods on hand that require almost no effort. Things like canned salmon or mercury-tested tuna, pre-cooked lentils, frozen vegetables, or even a rotisserie chicken. These may not feel as polished as your prepped recipes, but they'll get you through a busy week without derailing your progress.

This flexibility can help keep you out of the all-or-nothing mindset. You're not failing if you eat out, or if you rely on a protein shake, or if you skip meal prep one week. You're simply adjusting to life while still staying connected to your goals. That's what makes this sustainable.

This is why I say the system works in both directions. When you have the time and energy, it sets you up beautifully. When you don't, it gives you a framework so you don't lose ground.

## Bringing It All Together

We've covered a lot, so let's bring it all together.

At the heart of this system is one simple truth: when you set yourself up with structure, you remove the daily guesswork and overwhelm involved with feeding yourself. Instead of waking up each morning asking, *"How am I going to eat in a way that supports me today?"*, the decision has already been made. Your food is ready, it is balanced, and it is working with you rather than against you.

Perfection is not required, and if there is one thing we can be certain of, it's that life will happen. There will be travel, unexpected schedules, and weeks when preparation simply is not possible. That's why flexibility matters. A good system allows you to bend without breaking. It gives you backup options for those messy periods, so you do not feel like you have to start over.

At the same time, consistency matters more than most people realize. Doing "okay" some of the time rarely produces the changes people are hoping for, especially when the body is already depleted. You may have heard the 80/20 rule, where healthy choices make up about 80 percent of your intake. That approach can work well for maintenance, but when restoration is the goal, a higher level of consistency is often needed. Something closer to 90 percent or more may be supportive for a period of time while your system rebuilds. Consider committing to this level of care for several months and observe how your body responds.

This does not mean you can never eat out, enjoy a treat, or deviate from your plan. Those moments are part of life. What matters is how often they occur and how intentional they are. There is no universal formula because each body has its own sensitivities, history, and goals. For some people, a weekly indulgence fits comfortably. For others, it may slow progress. Over time, you will learn what works for you.

Consistency helps your body feel safe and resourced. It signals to your nervous system that nourishment is reliable rather than unpredictable. Flexibility remains important, but it cannot replace steady care. The balance between the two is what supports meaningful change.

So here is my invitation: Resist treating these pillars as a short term experiment. Give yourself time to build your system, practice preparation, and discover the level of consistency and flexibility that supports you. Pay attention to what happens as your body begins to settle. You may notice fewer cravings, more stable energy, and a steadier mood. These are signs that your system is receiving what it needs.

## Additional Nutrition Guidance

Here's a little extra guidance that will make your efforts pay off.

### “Better-for-You” Doesn't Mean Everyday Food

Brands like Simple Mills, Siete, Larabar, and many others create products with shorter ingredient lists and fewer additives. Compared to traditional cookies, chips, or snack bars, these are better choices. They may use almond flour instead of refined wheat or sweeteners like dates instead of high-fructose corn syrup. These foods can be helpful as you transition from hyper-processed foods to more whole foods-based choices.

The key, however, is remembering that these foods are still processed snacks. They are not the same as a whole-food meal of protein, vegetables, and healthy fats. Think of these foods as “emergency foods” rather than daily staples. They can save you when you're traveling, stuck in traffic, or need something fast between meetings, *occasionally*. They are not the enemy, but they are not the foundation of a healing diet either. Your nervous system and metabolism thrive on meals built around real, whole foods. Packaged snacks, even “better” ones, should be the backup plan, not the main plan. They don't belong in your everyday life.

### A Word About the “Protein Everything” Trend

Walk through any grocery store right now, and it feels like every product is suddenly a “protein” food. Protein bagels. Protein chips. Protein popcorn. Protein cookies. Protein cereal. Even protein candy. What?????

The marketing makes it sound like these foods are helping you meet an important nutritional goal. In reality, many of these products are highly-processed foods with isolated protein

powders, gums, artificial sweeteners, and chemical additives mixed in so the label can say “high protein.”

The problem is that the body does not use these foods the same way it uses real food.

Your body recognizes whole foods. These foods contain complete amino acid profiles along with the cofactors your body needs to actually use the protein. They support nourishment and stable energy.

Many hyper-processed “protein” products are built in a lab to *look* healthy. The protein is often extracted, isolated, and combined with stabilizers and additives that make the food shelf stable but far removed from what the body evolved to process. The label may say 15 or 20 grams of protein, but that does not mean your body can effectively absorb or utilize it.

This is what frustrates me.

People are trying to do the right thing. They are trying to improve their health. They see “protein” on the label and believe they are supporting their body. They eat these foods consistently, but nothing changes. Instead of questioning the food industry, people often blame themselves. They assume they lack discipline or that nothing works for their body.

Neither of those conclusions is true.

Many companies have become very skilled at selling “healthy-looking” food. The foundation of your nutrition should come from real food. If you can recognize it as food without a marketing department explaining it to you, you are probably on the right track.

## **The Truth About Trail Mix**

Trail mix seems like one of those “safe” snack foods, yet most versions on store shelves are highly misleading. They almost always contain dried fruit, which is essentially concentrated sugar without the fiber and water that make whole fruit balancing. A small handful can have as much sugar as a candy bar.

Add to that the industrial oils (soybean, canola, sunflower) used to roast the nuts, plus coatings like yogurt chips or chocolate pieces, and suddenly your “healthy snack” is a hyper-processed

sugar-and-oil bomb. Even mixed nuts can be a problem if they are roasted in cheap oils or heavily salted, making them easy to overeat.

Nuts and seeds themselves are nutrient-rich and supportive when eaten in moderation, especially if they are raw or dry-roasted without added oils. The problem is that trail mix is designed to be hyper-palatable—sweet, salty, crunchy, fatty all at once. That combination overrides fullness cues and makes it very easy to eat 600–800 calories before your body realizes what happened.

The takeaway is not that nuts are bad, but that trail mix and “snack blends” should not be treated as everyday staples. If you want nuts as part of your diet, buy them plain (raw or dry roasted, no oils or coatings) and portion them intentionally. Otherwise, trail mix belongs in the same category as “better-for-you cookies or chips”: an emergency backup food, not a foundation for regular nourishment.

## Navigating the Middle Aisles

Most of the healthiest foods in the grocery store are found around the perimeter.

That is where you typically find the foods closest to their natural state. Fresh vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, fish, yogurt, and real dairy. These foods do not need a marketing department to convince you they are healthy, and they are recognizable as food.

The middle aisles tend to look very different. That is where you find the boxes, bags, and brightly colored packaging designed to catch your attention: chips, crackers, sugary cereals, snack foods, hyper-processed “health” foods, and other products engineered to last for months or even years.

Most of these foods are built for shelf life, flavor intensity, and profit, not nourishment. They are often filled with refined grains, seed oils, stabilizers, and additives that make the product taste good and stay stable in a package.

That does not mean the middle aisles are completely off limits. Real life includes busy days, travel, and moments when convenience matters. I use foods from the middle aisles as well.

The key is choosing items that are still close to real food, made with simple ingredients, and supportive of your body rather than working against it.

The list below includes some of the foods I keep on hand. These are not the only good options, and they are certainly not required. They are simply choices that bring convenience into my life while still supporting my health.

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## Instead of Crackers, Chips, and Processed Snacks

When I want something crunchy, these are some options I reach for:

- Mary's Gone Crackers
  - Ezekiel bread
  - Flackers flax crackers
  - Organic sourdough bread
  - Brad's Veggie Flats
- 

## Simple Shelf-Stable Foods

These are convenient items that are still real food:

- Olives packed in glass jars
- Organic canned coconut milk
- Artichoke hearts in glass jars
- Organic bone broth cartons
- Wild canned salmon or sardines
- Unsweetened almond milk or coconut milk
- Canned beans such as chickpeas, black beans, or white beans (BPA-free cans, cartons or glass)
- Tomato products such as crushed tomatoes or tomato paste
- Canned lentils
- Natural nut butters with just nuts and salt

## Bars and Portable Protein

For days when you need something quick:

- Thunderbird bars
- Truvani bars
- Grass-fed beef jerky

These are far better choices than most protein bars filled with artificial sweeteners and processed ingredients.

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## Better Grain and Pasta Options

- Quinoa instead of white rice
- The Only Bean pasta instead of traditional pasta

These provide more fiber and protein while still being easy to prepare.

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## Protein Powders I Trust

Protein powders can be helpful when you need convenience, but purity matters. Many powders contain fillers, gums, artificial flavors, or low-quality protein sources that your body can't effectively utilize.

Some brands known for simple ingredients and higher quality sourcing include:

- Truvani
- Transformation Protein
- Naked Nutrition
- Puori
- Equip Prime Protein
- Garden of Life Raw Organic Protein

When choosing a protein powder, look for short ingredient lists, third-party testing, and minimal additives.

## Convenience Meals That Are Still Solid Choices

These are a few items I use when time is short, but I still want real food.

- Rao's marinara sauce
- Tasty Bite organic Indian meals

One of my favorite quick meals is heating a packet of Tasty Bite spinach, lentils, or chickpeas and adding a freshly cooked chicken breast. It takes just a few minutes and turns a simple shelf item into a balanced meal.

## The Big Picture

The foundation of your nutrition should still come from the perimeter of the grocery store. Fresh vegetables, quality protein, healthy fats, and whole foods will always do the heavy lifting for your health.

At the same time, thoughtful choices from the middle aisles can make life easier without pulling you away from your goals. When convenience foods are made with simple ingredients and resemble real food, they can absolutely have a place in a supportive and sustainable way of eating.

## Next Steps

Before you begin applying the specific nutrition pillars that follow, spend a few weeks dialing in a simple system for food planning and preparation. Focus on creating routines that make nourishing yourself easier. The goal is to reduce daily decision-making so your meals are largely handled before hunger and stress enter the picture.

During this time, pay attention to what works for your schedule, energy, and capacity. Adjust as needed until you have a basic rhythm that feels sustainable. This might include choosing a small set of reliable meals, establishing a regular grocery routine, and setting aside time for batch cooking or assembly. You need something you can repeat.

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Once that foundation is in place, the changes in the sections that follow will be much easier to implement because they will be layered onto a structure that already supports you. At that point, move on to the three pillars to add (protein, healthy fats, and fiber) and begin incorporating them into the meals you are already preparing.

Think of this as building the container first, then filling it. A strong system makes everything that comes next simpler, more consistent, and far less stressful.

## Sample Week Recipes

### Nourishing Lentil & Chicken Stew

Makes 6–8 servings

This balanced, one-pot meal is rich in protein, fiber, and nutrients. It reheats beautifully and can be customized with different toppings throughout the week.

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#### Ingredients

##### For the lentil base

- 2 cups dry lentils (green or brown), rinsed
- 4–5 cups bone broth (or water)
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1–2 cups diced tomatoes (fresh or canned)
- 2 cups riced cauliflower (fresh or frozen)

##### Seasonings

- 1½ teaspoons cumin
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon turmeric (optional)

- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1–2 tablespoons olive oil

##### For the chicken

- 2–3 pounds boneless chicken breasts or thighs
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: additional garlic powder or paprika

##### Optional toppings (choose what you like)

- Sliced avocado
  - Fresh cilantro or parsley
  - Extra olive oil
  - Lemon juice
- 

#### Instructions

##### 1. Cook the lentils

Place lentils and bone broth in a large pot. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Cook uncovered for about 20–25 minutes, or until tender.

##### 2. Add vegetables and seasonings

Stir in the chopped onion, tomatoes, riced cauliflower, olive oil, and all spices.

Continue simmering for another 5–10 minutes until the vegetables soften and flavors combine. Taste and adjust salt and pepper as needed.

### 3. Cook the chicken

While the lentils cook, heat a large skillet over medium heat. Add the chicken and season with salt, pepper, and any additional spices you like.

Sear both sides until lightly browned. Cover the pan, reduce heat to low, and cook gently for about 20 minutes (longer for thicker pieces) until fully cooked.

Let the chicken rest briefly, then cut into bite-size pieces.

### 4. Combine

Stir the cooked chicken into the lentil mixture.

### 5. Portion and store

Divide into glass containers for easy grab-and-go meals. Refrigerate for up to 4–5 days or freeze portions for later.

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## To Serve

Reheat a portion and add toppings such as avocado, herbs, lemon juice, or an extra drizzle of olive oil for freshness.

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## Roasted Vegetables, Quinoa & Salmon Power Bowls (Batch Prep)

Makes 4–6 servings

A balanced, colorful meal with high-quality protein, fiber, and healthy fats. Easy to customize with whatever vegetables you have on hand.

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### Ingredients

#### For the quinoa

- 1½ cups dry quinoa, rinsed
- 3 cups water or broth (I always use bone broth because it contributes to my protein goals)
- Pinch of salt

#### For the roasted vegetables

- 4–6 cups mixed vegetables, chopped (broccoli, carrots, bell peppers, zucchini, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, or sweet potato all work well)
- 2–3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano or Italian seasoning

- Salt and pepper to taste

### For the salmon

- 1½–2 pounds salmon fillets
- 1–2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: garlic powder, lemon pepper, or dill

### Optional toppings

- Lemon wedges
- Fresh herbs (parsley, cilantro, or dill)
- Avocado slices
- Extra olive oil or tahini drizzle

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## Instructions

### 1. Cook the quinoa

Combine quinoa, water or broth, and salt in a pot. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer for about 15 minutes until liquid is absorbed. Remove from heat and let sit covered for 5 minutes, then fluff with a fork.

### 2. Roast the vegetables

Preheat oven to 400°F (205°C).

Spread vegetables on a large baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with seasonings. Toss to coat evenly.

Roast for 20–30 minutes, stirring once halfway through, until tender and lightly browned.

### 3. Cook the salmon

Place salmon on a lined baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil and season.

Bake at 400°F for 12–15 minutes, depending on thickness, until the fish flakes easily with a fork.

### 4. Assemble

Divide quinoa, roasted vegetables, and salmon into containers.

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## To Serve

Reheat gently and add fresh toppings like lemon juice, herbs, or avocado for brightness.

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## Hearty Turkey & Bean Chili with Zucchini

Makes 6–8 servings

A deeply nourishing chili packed with protein, fiber, and vegetables. Freezes beautifully and often tastes even better the next day.

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## Ingredients

- 1½–2 pounds pastured ground turkey
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3–4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cans black beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 cans kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 large can diced tomatoes (28 oz)
- 1 small can diced green chilies
- 1–2 zucchini, roasted and cubed (about 2 cups)
- 1–2 tablespoons olive oil

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## Chili spices

- 1½ tablespoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon oregano
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional heat: pinch of cayenne or red pepper flakes

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## Instructions

### 1. Roast the zucchini

Preheat oven to 400°F (205°C).

Toss cubed zucchini with a little olive oil, salt, and pepper. Spread on a baking sheet and roast for 15–20 minutes until tender.

### 2. Brown the turkey

In a large pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add ground turkey and cook until browned, breaking it apart with a spoon.

### 3. Add aromatics

Stir in onion and cook for about 5 minutes until softened. Add garlic and cook for another minute.

### 4. Add remaining ingredients

Add beans, tomatoes, green chilies, roasted zucchini, and all spices. Stir well.

### 5. Simmer

Bring to a gentle simmer and cook uncovered for 20–30 minutes, allowing flavors to develop. Add a splash of water or broth if it becomes too thick.

Taste and adjust seasoning.

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## Portion and store

Divide into containers for easy meals throughout the week. Refrigerate up to 5 days or freeze for longer storage.

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## Optional toppings

- Avocado
- Fresh cilantro
- Plain Greek yogurt or dairy-free alternative
- Lime juice
- Extra olive oil

## Your Protein Ladder

This ladder is designed to help you move from your current protein intake to an optimal level in a manageable, sustainable way. You may break any rung into smaller steps, work on more than one rung at a time, or focus on multiple nutrition ladders simultaneously.

For example, over the next seven days you might take the first rung of your protein ladder while also beginning the first rung of your healthy fats ladder. Choose combinations that feel manageable and meaningful rather than difficult or overwhelming.

Refer back to the five-step, seven-day method from the previous module to help you select your ladder rungs effectively.

Finally, consider the quality of your protein sources. The nutrients in animal foods reflect what those animals were fed. Whenever possible, choose grass-fed, pasture-raised, and organic options. For seafood, prioritize wild-caught varieties.

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### Rung 1: Track, Set Your Goal, and Distribute It Across the Day

This rung has two parts: tracking your intake and establishing a target.

If tracking only protein feels more manageable at first, that is perfectly acceptable. You can track other elements of your diet after you get protein dialed in. Apps such as Cronometer, MyFitnessPal can help. Avoid apps that estimate intake from photos, as they tend to be inaccurate.

Calculate your target as approximately 1 gram of protein per pound of desired body weight. For example, if your goal weight is 150 pounds, your long-term target would be about 150 grams of protein per day. This number represents the top of your ladder, not what you must achieve immediately.

Divide this target across your meals and, if needed, one snack. A 120-gram goal might look like 40 grams per meal, or 35 grams per meal plus a 15-gram snack. Write this down as your guidepost.

## Rung 2: Add Protein to Breakfast

Increase your current breakfast protein intake by 10–15 grams. Examples include:

- Add two egg whites to scrambled eggs or an omelet for an extra 6–8 grams
  - Pair your meal with cottage cheese or Greek yogurt
  - Include smoked salmon, turkey, or chicken sausage
  - Add a small smoothie with clean protein powder, nut milk, and fruit
  - Stir protein or collagen powder into coffee
  - Add lentils or quinoa to a savory breakfast bowl
  - Sprinkle edamame or roasted chickpeas into a veggie scramble
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## Rung 3: Build a Full Protein Breakfast

Increase breakfast protein to approximately one-third of your daily target.

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## Rung 4: Add Protein to Lunch

Increase protein at lunch by 10–15 grams. This may be as simple as adding an extra ounce or two of chicken, beans, tofu, or another protein source.

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## Rung 5: Build a Full Protein Lunch

Bring lunch to roughly one-third of your daily target. This often involves increasing protein portions while moderating refined carbohydrates.

When dining out, consider requesting extra protein. You can also add beans, lentils, pumpkin seeds, or hemp seeds to boost protein content.

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## Rung 6: Add Protein to Dinner

Increase protein at dinner by 10–15 grams.

## Rung 7: Build a Full Protein Dinner

Bring dinner to approximately one-third of your daily target. Protein becomes the centerpiece of the meal, typically 4–6 ounces of meat, poultry, or fish, or a carefully constructed plant-based combination.

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## Rung 8: If You Snack, Make It Protein

If a snack is needed to reach your goal, choose a protein-based option providing about 15–20 grams. Examples include jerky, boiled eggs, cottage cheese, or roasted chickpeas.

The objective is not to increase snacking but to make snacks purposeful when used.

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## Rung 9: Expand Your Protein Sources

Experiment with a variety of protein options such as fish, bison, lentils, cottage cheese, tempeh, or hemp seeds. Notice which foods leave you feeling satisfied, energized, and comfortable digestively.

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## Rung 10: Balance and Fine-Tune Across the Day

Review your overall intake. Are you consistently meeting your target? Adjust portions, meal composition, or variety until your daily rhythm feels natural and sustainable.

Now that you have adequate protein consumption dialed, ask yourself the following questions. Have you noticed:

- Longer satiety between meals
- Fewer cravings
- More stable energy
- Improved recovery from exercise
- Better mood stability

## Protein Ladder Cheat Sheet

- **Rung 1:** Track, Set Your Goal, and Distribute It Across the Day

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- **Rung 2:** Add Protein to Breakfast

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- **Rung 3:** Build a Full Protein Breakfast

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- **Rung 4:** Add Protein to Lunch

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- **Rung 5:** Build a Full Protein Lunch

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- **Rung 6:** Add Protein to Dinner

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- **Rung 7:** Build a Full Protein Dinner

---

- **Rung 8:** If You Snack, Make It Protein

---

- **Rung 9:** Expand Your Protein Sources

---

- **Rung 10:** Balance and Fine-Tune Across the Day

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## Top Protein Sources

### Animal-Based Protein

- Chicken breast (26g per 3 oz)
  - Ground turkey (22g per 3 oz)
  - Eggs (6g per egg with 4g in the white and 2g in the yolk)
  - Greek yogurt (15–20g per  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup)
  - Cottage cheese (14g per  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup)
  - Tuna or salmon (20–25g per 3 oz)
  - Steak or beef (22–26g per 3 oz)
- 

### Plant-Based Protein

- Lentils (18g per cup, cooked)
  - Chickpeas (14g per cup, cooked)
  - Black beans (15g per cup)
  - Quinoa (8g per cup, cooked)
  - Tofu (10g per  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup)
  - Tempeh (15g per  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup)
  - Edamame (17g per cup)
  - Edamame or black bean pasta (20–25g per serving, depending on brand; *The Only Bean* is a great option with 44 grams per serving)
- 

### Protein Boosters

- Protein powders (15–30g per scoop)
- Hemp seeds (10g per 3 tbsp)
- Chia seeds (5g per 2 tbsp)
- Nut butters (7g per 2 tbsp)
- Pumpkin seeds (7g per  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup)

## Easy Meal Ideas

- Protein smoothie with Greek yogurt, berries, chia, and protein powder
- Scrambled eggs with sautéed veggies and avocado (I often do 3 whole eggs with two egg whites equaling 26 grams of protein)
- Lentil soup or chili with ground meat

- Chicken or tempeh stir fry over quinoa
- Hard-boiled eggs and nuts as a snack

## Pillar Two: Healthy Fats

Eat 3–5 servings of the following healthy fats per day.

A serving is typically 1 tablespoon of oil, 1/4 of an avocado, or a small handful (about 1 ounce) of nuts or seeds.

### Oils (cold-pressed, organic when possible):

- Olive oil (extra virgin)
- Avocado oil
- Coconut oil
- Flaxseed oil (use raw only, not for cooking)
- Walnut oil (use raw only)
- Ghee or grass-fed butter

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### Whole Foods:

- Avocados
- Nuts: almonds, walnuts, cashews, macadamias
- Seeds: chia, flax, pumpkin, sunflower, sesame
- Nut butters (without added sugar or hydrogenated oils)
- Olives (green or black, water-packed or brined)
- Coconuts and unsweetened coconut flakes

### Fatty Fish (wild-caught when possible):

- Salmon
- Mackerel
- Sardines
- Anchovies
- Herring

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### Refined or processed vegetable oils to avoid:

- Canola oil
- Soybean oil
- Corn oil
- Cottonseed oil
- Safflower oil
- Grapeseed oil
- Margarine and shortening

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### Fat Bombs

One way to make sure you are eating healthy fats that helps with sugar cravings and blood sugar swings is adding 1-2 fat bombs to your daily nutrition plan.

Here are two recipes for you to try:

### Coconut Cacao Fat Bombs

#### Ingredients:

- ½ cup coconut oil
- ½ cup almond butter (or any unsweetened nut/seed butter)
- ¼ cup raw cacao powder
- 1–2 tbsp maple syrup or monk fruit/stevia (optional). Gradually reduce the amount of sweetener you add each time you make the recipe.
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Pinch of sea salt
- Shredded coconut for rolling (optional)

## Instructions:

1. Melt coconut oil and nut butter together over low heat.
  2. Stir in cacao powder, sweetener, vanilla, and salt.
  3. Pour into silicone molds or mini muffin liners.
  4. Chill in the fridge or freezer until firm.
  5. Roll in shredded coconut if you like a little texture.
- 

## Mocha Collagen Bombs

### Ingredients:

- ½ cup cashew butter
- ¼ cup coconut oil or melted ghee
- 2 tbsp cacao powder
- 1 tbsp instant coffee or espresso powder
- 2 scoops collagen peptides
- Dash of cinnamon and pinch of salt  
Sweetener of choice to taste (maple syrup, monk fruit, etc.)

### Instructions:

1. Mix all ingredients until smooth.
2. Spoon into molds or roll into balls and refrigerate.
3. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 10 days.

## Healthy Fats Ladder

This ladder is designed to help you move from your current fat intake to an optimal level of nourishing fats, generally three to five servings per day. It focuses on both removing inflammatory fats and adding the types your body needs for stable energy, hormone support, and lasting satiety.

As with all ladders, you may break any rung into smaller steps, stay on a rung as long as needed, take on more than one rung at a time, or work on multiple ladders simultaneously. For example, over the next seven days, you might begin the first rung of your Healthy Fats Ladder while also working on the first rung of your Protein Ladder.

Healthy fat intake and sugar reduction often reinforce each other, since adequate fat can help reduce cravings for quick energy from sugar.

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### Rung 1: Clear Out Inflammatory Oils

Go through your pantry and discard corn, soybean, safflower, sunflower, cottonseed, and generic “vegetable oil blends.” These oils are common sources of inflammation and appear in many processed foods.

Replace them with stable, nourishing options such as:

- Extra virgin olive oil for salads and low-heat cooking
- Avocado oil for high-heat cooking
- Coconut oil for baking or frying

Learn how to use each oil appropriately so you feel confident cooking with them.

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### Rung 2: Learn and Measure Serving Sizes

Become familiar with what a true serving of healthy fat looks like. Measure portions for at least the first few weeks, as fats are easy to overconsume without realizing it.

Examples of one serving:

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 2 tablespoons nuts or seeds
- ¼ of a medium avocado
- 1 tablespoon chia or hemp seeds

Even small miscalculations can significantly change your daily intake.

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### **Rung 3: Clean Up and Add Healthy Fats to Breakfast**

Start your day by removing unhealthy fats and adding one serving of nourishing fat to breakfast.

#### **Step 1: Check labels**

Unhealthy fats often hide in foods marketed as convenient or healthy, including:

- Coffee creamers, especially flavored or non-dairy versions
- Breakfast or protein bars
- Granola and cereals made with seed oils
- Margarine or spreadable butter substitutes
- Packaged baked goods

#### **Step 2: Swap out and swap in**

Examples:

- Avocado with eggs instead of margarine on toast
  - Greek yogurt topped with walnuts, chia, and hemp or pumpkin seeds instead of store-bought granola
  - A smoothie with unsweetened nut butter instead of processed bars
- 

### **Rung 4: Clean Up and Add Healthy Fats to Lunch**

Use lunch as an opportunity to eliminate hidden unhealthy fats and add one serving of nourishing fats.

**Common hidden sources include:**

- Salad dressings made with soybean, canola, or generic vegetable oils
- Prepared deli salads or packaged meats
- Processed wraps, tortillas, or snack foods
- Frozen or convenience meals with added oils

**Supportive swaps:**

- Homemade dressing using olive oil, lemon, and herbs
- Avocado-oil mayonnaise or mashed avocado
- Pumpkin seeds, hemp seeds, or olives for added fat and texture
- Fresh proteins instead of processed lunch meats

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**Rung 5: Clean Up and Add Healthy Fats to Dinner**

End the day with a dinner that eliminates hidden unhealthy fats and includes one or two servings of nourishing fats to promote satisfaction and stable energy.

**Unhealthy fats often enter through:**

- Bottled marinades or sauces
- Pre-seasoned frozen foods
- Boxed or packaged side dishes
- Restaurant meals cooked in seed oils

**Supportive swaps:**

- Roast vegetables in avocado or olive oil
- Make simple homemade marinades with oil, herbs, and spices
- Choose fatty fish or grass-fed meats
- Finish dishes with a drizzle of olive oil or a sprinkle of seeds

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**Rung 6: Make a Batch of Fat Bombs**

Prepare a batch of no-sugar or low-sugar fat bombs for quick, satisfying snacks or to round out a meal when your fat intake is low.

For your first batch, you may include a small amount of honey or maple syrup. With each new batch, reduce the sweetener until you can make them fully unsweetened.

Store them in the freezer so they are always available when needed.

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## Rung 7: Choose Better When Eating Out

Ask restaurants what oils they use. When possible:

- Request olive oil, avocado oil, or no added oil
  - Avoid fried foods cooked in seed oils
  - Choose grilled or steamed proteins and vegetables
  - Add your own healthy fat at home if necessary
- 

## Rung 8: Clear Out Hidden Fats at Home

In step one, you removed the unhealthy cooking oils from your home. In this step, you're invited to conduct a second sweep of your pantry and refrigerator, focusing on condiments, packaged foods, and snacks.

Discard items containing soybean, corn, safflower, or generic vegetable oils. Replace them with cleaner alternatives such as:

- Avocado-oil mayonnaise
- Nut butters without added oils
- Clean salad dressings with only oil, vinegar, and spices (or better yet, make these yourself).

Continue reading labels as new foods enter your home.

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## Rung 9: Fine-Tune for Your Needs

Adjust intake based on your body's feedback.

- Smaller or less active individuals may thrive on three servings per day
- Larger or more active individuals may need four or five

- Pay attention to hunger, cravings, and energy

Make adjustments gradually while continuing to measure.

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## **Rung 10: Review Your Mix of Healthy Fats**

Evaluate the types of fats you consume to ensure variety:

- Monounsaturated fats such as olive oil and avocado
- Omega-3 fats from fatty fish, chia seeds, and hemp seeds
- Saturated fats such as coconut oil or grass-fed butter

A balanced mix supports overall health, satiety, and metabolic stability.

## Healthy Fats Cheat Sheet

- **Rung 1:** Clear Out Inflammatory Oils

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- **Rung 2:** Learn and Measure Serving Sizes

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- **Rung 3:** Clean Up and Add Healthy Fats to Breakfast

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- **Rung 4:** Clean Up and Add Healthy Fats to Lunch

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- **Rung 5:** Clean Up and Add Healthy Fats to Dinner

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- **Rung 6:** Make a Batch of Fat Bombs

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- **Rung 7:** Choose Better When Eating Out

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- **Rung 8:** Clear Out Hidden Fats at Home

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- **Rung 9:** Fine-Tune for Your Needs

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- **Rung 10:** Review Your Mix of Healthy Fats

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## Pillar Three: Fiber

### Top 25 High-Fiber Foods

#### Vegetables

Food	Serving Size	Fiber (g)
Broccoli (cooked)	1 cup	5 g
Brussels sprouts (cooked)	1 cup	4 g
Carrots (raw) 1 cup sticks	1 cup sticks	3.5 g
Cauliflower (cooked)	1 cup	3 g
Sweet potato (baked, with skin)	1 medium	4 g

#### Fruits

Food	Serving Size	Fiber (g)
Raspberries	1 cup	8 g
Blackberries	1 cup	7.5 g
Pear (with skin)	1 medium	6 g
Apple (with skin)	1 medium	4.5 g
Orange	1 medium	3.5 g

#### Legumes

Food	Serving Size	Fiber (g)
Lentils (cooked)	1 cup	15 g
Black beans (cooked)	1 cup	15 g
Chickpeas (cooked)	1 cup	12 g

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Food	Serving Size	Fiber (g)
Kidney beans (cooked)	1 cup	11 g
Edamame (shelled)	1 cup	8 g

## Whole Grains

Food	Serving Size	Fiber (g)
Quinoa (cooked)	1 cup	5 g
Barley (cooked)	1 cup	6 g
Oats (steel-cut, cooked)	1 cup	5 g
Brown rice (cooked)	1 cup	3.5 g

## Nuts and Seeds

Food	Serving Size	Fiber (g)
Chia seeds	2 tbsp	10 g
Flax seeds (ground)	2 tbsp	5 g
Hemp seeds	2 tbsp	2 g
Almonds	¼ cup (about 23 nuts)	4 g
Pumpkin seeds	¼ cup	3 g

## Fiber Supplementation Options

### Psyllium Husk (e.g., Metamucil, plain psyllium)

- **Pros:**
  - Excellent for both soluble and insoluble fiber
  - Supports digestion and bowel regularity

- Helps with satiety and blood sugar control
- **Cons:**
  - Can thicken quickly in liquid, so drink immediately
  - May cause bloating if you start with too much

**Tip:** Start with ½ teaspoon in water or a smoothie, then increase slowly.

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## Acacia Fiber

- **Pros:**
  - Gentle on the gut, well-tolerated by sensitive stomachs
  - Blends easily into liquids without thickening
  - Supports healthy gut bacteria
- **Cons:**
  - Provides only soluble fiber, so pair with high-fiber foods for balance

**Tip:** Ideal for people easing into higher fiber intake or managing IBS symptoms.

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## Inulin or Chicory Root Fiber

- **Pros:**
  - Prebiotic properties to support gut microbiome health
  - Easy to mix into smoothies or yogurt
- **Cons:**
  - Can cause gas or bloating in some people
  - Provides only soluble fiber

**Tip:** Start with a very small dose and increase slowly.

## Methylcellulose (e.g., Citrucel)

- **Pros:**
  - Non-fermentable, so less likely to cause gas or bloating
  - Supports stool regularity
- **Cons:**
  - Lacks the prebiotic benefits of other fibers

**Tip:** Good option if other fibers upset your stomach.

---

## Ground Flaxseed

- **Pros:**
  - Naturally high in both fiber and omega-3s
  - Easy to sprinkle on yogurt, oatmeal, or smoothies
- **Cons:**
  - Must be ground to release nutrients
  - Needs refrigeration to stay fresh

**Tip:** Add 1–2 tablespoons daily as a gentle boost.

## Gentle Ramp-Up: Let Your Gut Adapt

Even healthy, high-fiber foods can cause bloating, gas, or discomfort when introduced too quickly. This happens because the fiber feeds beneficial bacteria in your gut, which produce more gas as they expand.

- Increasing fiber intake gradually allows your gut microbiome to adapt, leading to less discomfort.

- A low-fiber diet can reduce microbial diversity, while increasing fiber opens new “nutritional niches,” allowing healthy bacteria to flourish
- Over time, consistent fiber intake supports metabolic health, gut motility, and even longevity

If up-leveling your fiber intake feels uncomfortable—stick with it. When you boost fiber, your gut bacteria begin to shift and grow. That’s a good thing, but it can cause bloating or gas at first. To avoid discomfort, go slow: add a little extra fiber, stay well hydrated, and let your body adjust. Over time, your digestion will improve, gut health will strengthen, and you’ll truly feel the benefits.

### Quick Reference Guide for Adding Fiber Wisely

Strategy	Why It Helps
Increase fiber gradually (add 2–3 grams at a time)	Gives your gut bacteria time to adjust
Drink plenty of water	Helps fiber move smoothly through your system
Include fermented foods (like yogurt, kefir, kimchi)	Supports digestive balance and microbial diversity
Track your symptoms	Helps identify what works and when it’s time to pause

## Fiber Ladder

The following ladder is meant to take you from where you are today to optimal fiber consumption of 25-40 grams per day.

As with all the ladders, you can break down any of the rungs into smaller components. You can take as long as you need with each rung, take on more than one rung, or work on one or more other ladders at the same time. For example, over the next seven days, you can take the first rung of your Fiber Ladder as well as the first rung on your Protein Ladder or any other combination that suits you.

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### Rung 1: Track Your Current Fiber Intake

Spend 3 days tracking how much fiber you're eating. Use a nutrition app, food labels, or a simple online search to estimate grams.

Build awareness without judgment. Most Americans only get 10–15 grams per day – yikes.

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### Rung 2: Learn Your Fiber Sources

Educate yourself on high-fiber foods in different categories, so you know where to pull from:

- **Vegetables:** Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, leafy greens, carrots
- **Fruits:** Berries, apples, pears, oranges
- **Legumes:** Lentils, black beans, chickpeas
- **Whole grains:** Quinoa, barley, brown rice
- **Nuts & Seeds:** Chia, flax, hemp, almonds, pumpkin seeds

Keep a list handy so you can build meals easily. There is more information on this topic below.

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### Rung 3: Bring Breakfast Up to 8 Grams

Aim for ~8 grams of fiber at breakfast by making small swaps or additions:

- Add chia or flax seeds to a smoothie or yogurt

- Top yogurt or oatmeal with berries
  - Add fruit or vegetables
- 

### **Rung 4: Bring Lunch Up to 8 Grams**

Layer fiber-rich foods into lunch:

- Add a salad with leafy greens and colorful vegetables
  - Include beans or lentils in soups, bowls, or salads
- 

### **Rung 5: Bring Dinner Up to 8 Grams**

Round out dinner with fiber:

- Serve 2–3 cups of vegetables with your protein
  - Add beans, lentils, or chickpeas as a side or part of the main dish
  - Choose whole grains like quinoa, farro, or barley
- 

### **Rung 6: Review and Track Again**

Pause and track your intake again for 2–3 days. By now, you should be close to 25 grams of fiber per day without big changes. This awareness sets you up for the next phase.

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### **Rung 7: Boost Breakfast to 10–15 Grams**

Level up your morning meal:

- Add an extra serving of vegetables or an extra tablespoon of seeds
  - Make a chia pudding topped with berries
- 

### **Rung 8: Boost Lunch to 10–15 Grams**

Take lunch to the next level:

- Double up vegetables in a salad or bowl
  - Add a half cup of beans or lentils
  - Choose a hearty vegetable soup or chili
- 

### **Rung 9: Boost Dinner to 10–12 Grams**

Make dinner fiber-dense but satisfying:

- Use a variety of vegetables
  - Include a half cup of beans, lentils, or chickpeas
- 

### **Rung 10: Fine-Tune to 35+ Grams Daily**

With balanced fiber in each meal, you should easily reach or exceed 35 grams daily. Adjust based on how you feel:

- If digestion feels heavy, increase gradually or space fiber more evenly
- Stay hydrated, as fiber works best with enough water
- Keep your “fiber list” nearby for variety and inspiration
- If you still find yourself falling short, consider a fiber supplement.
- Food should always be your first source of fiber, but supplements can help fill the gap if you consistently come up short of your daily goal. Look for a clean, additive-free supplement such as plain psyllium husk, acacia fiber, or inulin. Start slowly, adding just a small amount to water or a smoothie, and increase gradually to avoid bloating or discomfort. Always drink plenty of water to help the fiber work effectively.

## Fiber Ladder Cheat Sheet

- **Rung 1:** Track Your Current Fiber Intake

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- **Rung 2:** Learn Your Fiber Sources

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- **Rung 3:** Bring Breakfast Up to 8 Grams

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- **Rung 4:** Bring Lunch Up to 8 Grams

---

- **Rung 5:** Bring Dinner Up to 8 Grams

---

- **Rung 6:** Review and Track Again

---

- **Rung 7:** Boost Breakfast to 10–15 Grams

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- **Rung 8:** Boost Lunch to 10–15 Grams

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- **Rung 9:** Boost Dinner to 10–12 Grams

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- **Rung 10:** Fine-Tune to 35+ Grams Daily and Consider

Supplementation if Needed

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# CHAPTER 13

## Sugar and Hyper-Processed Foods

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As we explored in Chapter 13, sugar and hyper-processed foods can wreak havoc on your energy, sleep, mood, and cravings, often leaving you feeling like you constantly need “something” just to keep going. Simply trying to cut them out rarely works for long. These foods are designed to override your body’s normal hunger and fullness signals, making them especially hard to resist when you are stressed, depleted, or running on empty.

In this chapter, we are not approaching sugar and hyper-processed foods from a place of restriction or willpower. Instead, the focus is on supporting your body and giving it what it needs to restore stable energy. The goal is change that you can live with, not a burst of heroic effort followed by burnout.

As with the other nutrition pillars, you will work with ladder rungs, experiments, and data rather than relying on discipline alone. You might begin by swapping a single item, adjusting portion sizes, or choosing a higher-quality version of something you already eat. These small shifts add up quickly, especially as your protein, healthy fats, and fiber intake improve alongside them.

You may also discover that cravings are not just about food. Poor sleep, stress, emotional discomfort, habit patterns, and convenience all play a role in what you reach for. This chapter includes ways to address those underlying factors so you are working with your biology and your real life, not fighting against them.

Approach this process with curiosity rather than judgment. Every change you make is a step toward greater stability and resilience. You are building a way of eating that supports you even on busy or difficult days. Choose a rung that feels both meaningful and manageable, commit to it for the next seven days, and let your results guide what comes next.

## Sugar Recommendations

Your goal will be to eventually reduce *added* sugar to less than 15 grams most days. This refers to sugar that is added to foods AND drinks during manufacturing, cooking, or at the table.

- White or brown sugar – 4 grams per teaspoon
- Honey – 5 grams per teaspoon
- Maple Syrup – 4 grams per teaspoon
- Agave Syrup – 5 grams per teaspoon

Naturally occurring sugars in foods like fruits and dairy products do not count toward the 15 gram allowance.

Since sugar shows up in almost every packaged food, you'll have to read labels to see how much you're getting. Most people are shocked to find how much sugar they are eating when they include various sources.

## Sugar Substitutes

I also recommend that you eliminate sugar substitutes as well. The most comprehensive research suggests that they are not effective for weight loss or for improving your health. The goal is to reduce sweetness overall, not just swap one sweetener for another. Even natural options like raw stevia or monk fruit may be fine in very small amounts, but it is important to notice how your body responds.

Artificial and non-nutritive sweeteners can keep cravings alive, confuse your hunger signals, and trigger blood sugar and insulin responses even without calories. They can also disrupt gut health, alter your taste buds so real food tastes less satisfying, and make it harder to truly reset your palate. In addition, they reinforce the habit of reaching for something sweet whenever

you feel tired, stressed, or emotionally unsettled, which prevents your body from relearning how to regulate energy and mood without that constant stimulus.

Over time, this can keep you locked in the same cycle you are trying to break, where sweetness becomes the default coping mechanism rather than an occasional enjoyment. If you notice stalled progress, increased cravings, or digestive changes, consider removing these sweeteners entirely. Even if you tolerate them well, they should be used sparingly and not as an everyday habit. Reducing your overall dependence on sweet flavors supports steady energy, fewer cravings, healthier digestion, and better metabolic balance.

### **Learn to recognize sugar by its many names**

- Sugar appears under many different names on ingredient lists, including cane sugar, brown sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, maltose, sucrose, agave, honey, molasses, maltodextrin, fruit juice concentrate, rice syrup, barley malt, and dozens of other variations.
- Food manufacturers often use multiple forms of sugar in a single product, making it harder to recognize how much is actually there. If a product lists more than one of these, it's a red flag.

### **Pay attention to serving sizes**

- Manufacturers often shrink serving sizes so the sugar looks lower on the label.
- Compare the serving size to what you'd realistically eat. A granola bar may say 8g sugar "per half bar," when you'll definitely eat the whole thing (making it 16g).

### **Don't be fooled by "natural" sugars**

- Honey, agave, maple syrup, coconut sugar, or fruit juice concentrate all hit the bloodstream as sugar. They're not magically healthy just because the word sounds natural.

## Replacements

As you begin to reduce sugar, it's helpful to have replacements for your usual go-tos. Rather than deny yourself, offer yourself something delicious and nourishing. The following ideas will get you started.

Instead of this:	Try this:
Sugary granola bar	Apple slices with almond butter
Flavored yogurt	Full-fat plain yogurt + berries + cinnamon
Candy	1–2 fat bombs
Sugary coffee drinks	Cold brew with almond milk and cinnamon
Baked goods	Chia pudding, coconut flour muffins, or fat bombs
Soda	Sparkling water with lime, berries, or cucumber
Ice cream	Frozen banana “nice cream” with cacao and nut butter blended for one minute

## No Sugar Needed Recipes

### Almond-Walnut Fruit Cobbler

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#### Ingredients

- **Fruit base:**
  - 2 cups fruit of your choice (berries, peaches, or cherries work well)
- **Topping:**
  - ½ cup almond flour
  - ¼ cup crushed walnuts
  - 2 tablespoons butter or coconut oil, melted
  - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
  - 1 teaspoon baking powder
  - Pinch of cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt

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## Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Place the fruit in a small baking dish.
3. In a small bowl, mix almond flour, walnuts, butter or coconut oil, vanilla, baking powder, and spices until crumbly.
4. Spread topping evenly over the fruit.
5. Bake for 25–30 minutes, until the fruit is bubbly and the topping is golden.
6. Serve warm with a side of plain Greek yogurt to help stabilize blood sugar and add satisfying protein.

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## Nutrition (per serving, serves 4)

- Calories: ~180–205
- Protein: ~4 g
- Fiber: ~2 g
- Natural sugar (from fruit): ~4–10 g, depending on the fruit you choose. Note that since the sugar here comes only from fruit, you do not need to count it toward the daily 18 gram allowance.

For the lowest natural sugar, choose raspberries or strawberries. For a slightly sweeter version, try mixed berries, peaches, blueberries, or cherries.

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## Chocolate Avocado Mousse

### Ingredients

- 2 large ripe avocados (about 1 cup flesh)
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ¼ cup full-fat coconut milk
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch of sea salt
- 2 tablespoons crushed pistachios for topping

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### Instructions

- Scoop avocado flesh into a blender or food processor.
- Add cocoa powder, coconut milk, honey, vanilla, and salt.
- Blend until silky smooth, scraping down the sides as needed.
- Chill for at least 30 minutes for the best flavor and texture.

- Spoon into serving dishes and top with crushed pistachios just before serving.

---

**Nutrition (per serving, serves 4)**

- Calories: ~171
- Protein: ~3.6 g
- Fat: ~13.4 g
- Fiber: ~5.8 g
- Added sugar: ~4.5 g

Don't stop now. There are tons of low-sugar dessert recipes to be found on the internet. Mark Hyman is always a great go-to! His recipe books, such as the Blood Sugar Solution 10 Day Detox Cookbook is a great place to start.

## The Sugar Reduction Ladder

As with all the ladders, you can break down any of the rungs into smaller components. You can take as long as you need with each rung, take on more than one rung, or work on one or more other ladders at the same time. For example, over the next seven days, you can take the first rung of your Sugar Reduction Ladder as well as the first rung on your Protein Ladder or any other combination that suits you. Your Healthy Fats and Sugar Reduction Ladders go great together since consumption of healthy fats is known to take the edge off sugar cravings.

---

### Rung 1: Track Your Sugar Intake

Track your grams of sugar for five days, including at least one weekend day, to understand your baseline. Log added sugars in everything you eat or drink. This process helps you start recognizing where sugars are hiding, whether in packaged snacks, sauces, or even “healthy” foods like granola or flavored yogurt.

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### Rung 2: Review Your Log and Make Two Smart Swaps

As you continue tracking, look over your log from the five-day period and identify the two foods or drinks adding the most sugar to your day. Choose better options to replace them. Examples:

- Replace soda with sparkling water and lemon
  - Swap flavored yogurt for plain Greek yogurt with berries
  - Trade your morning pastry for eggs and avocado
  - Replace packaged snack bars with a handful of nuts and seeds
- 

### Rung 3: Make and Use Fat Bombs to Manage Cravings

Sugar cravings can derail your progress if you don't have a satisfying alternative ready. Make a batch of fat bombs this week and keep them in the freezer or refrigerator. When a craving strikes, especially between meals or after dinner, reach for a fat bomb instead of a sugary snack. The healthy fats help stabilize blood sugar, reduce hunger, and keep cravings from escalating.

## Rung 4: Navigate Eating Out with Confidence

Eating out doesn't have to derail your progress. Plan ahead and make intentional choices so you can enjoy your meal without the hidden sugar overload.

- Ask about sauces and dressings. Request them on the side or swap for olive oil and vinegar.
  - Skip sugary drinks like sodas, sweet teas, and cocktails; choose water, sparkling water, or unsweetened tea instead.
  - Order smart by focusing on protein, vegetables, and healthy fats.
  - Decide on dessert in advance. Either skip it, have a bite or two, or plan for a low-sugar treat at home so you don't feel deprived.
- 

## Rung 5: Clean Up Breakfast

- High-sugar breakfasts spike blood sugar and set you up for cravings.
  - Swap sugary cereals, flavored yogurts, and breakfast bars for balanced, low-sugar meals:
    - Eggs with avocado
    - Plain Greek yogurt with berries
    - Chia pudding with unsweetened almond milk
- 

## Rung 6: Clean Up Snacks

- Trade high-sugar snacks (granola bars, sweetened nuts, or energy drinks) for low-sugar options:
  - Nuts and seeds
  - Veggies and hummus
  - Cheese with cucumber slices

## Rung 7: Clean Up Lunch

Midday meals often hide more sugar than you think, especially in condiments, sauces, or “healthy” grab-and-go options. Start by reviewing your usual lunches and making swaps that align with your sugar goals.

- Swap sweet dressings for olive oil and vinegar or a clean vinaigrette.
  - Choose protein and veggies first, then add healthy fats like avocado, nuts, or seeds for satiety.
  - Watch for hidden sugars in deli meats, wraps, soups, or “protein bowls.” Look for versions without added sweeteners or prep your own.
  - Batch-prepare simple components like grilled chicken, greens, and roasted veggies to make building a low-sugar lunch quick and easy.
- 

## Rung 8: Clean Up Dinner

Dinner is where sauces, marinades, and convenience foods can quietly load your plate with sugar. Focus on simple, whole-food meals with balanced protein, vegetables, and healthy fats.

- Check your sauces. Many marinades, stir-fry sauces, and barbecue sauces contain significant added sugar. Swap for clean versions or make your own.
  - Build your plate around protein and veggies, then use fats like olive oil or butter to make the meal satisfying.
  - Skip “hidden sugar” sides like rolls, sugary condiments, or flavored rice blends.
- 

## Rung 9: Find a Low Sugar Dessert You Really Enjoy

Remove typical sugar-laden desserts and experiment a couple of times a week with a dessert that satisfies your sweet cravings without derailing your sugar goals. I included two of my favorite recipes above. By now, your taste buds are probably shifting, making these low-sugar options desirable.

## Rung 10: Pause and Check in with Your Cravings

By this stage, you'll have a better sense of whether your cravings are biological, like when you've skipped a meal, didn't get enough sleep, or your blood sugar has dropped, or more emotional, such as when you're stressed, bored, or seeking comfort.

When a craving hits, pause for a moment and ask yourself:

- Am I truly hungry, or am I feeling something else: stress, fatigue, loneliness, or habit?
- What non-food action could meet that need, like taking a walk, calling a friend, or doing a quick breathing exercise?

If you find that your cravings still feel unmanageable or that emotional eating is a major challenge, it's time to get support. You don't have to do this alone—visit [LoriMontry.com](https://LoriMontry.com) for tools, guidance, and support to help you break the cycle for good.

## The Sugar Reduction Ladder Cheat Sheet

- **Rung 1:** Track Your Sugar Intake

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- **Rung 2:** Review Your Log and Make Two Smart Swaps

---

- **Rung 3:** Make and Use Fat Bombs to Manage Cravings

---

- **Rung 4:** Navigate Eating Out with Confidence

---

- **Rung 5:** Clean Up Breakfast

---

- **Rung 6:** Clean Up Snacks

---

- **Rung 7:** Clean Up Lunch

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- **Rung 8:** Clean Up Dinner

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- **Rung 9:** Find a Low- or No-Sugar Dessert You Really Enjoy

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- **Rung 10:** Pause and Check in with Your Cravings

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## Hyper-processed Foods

Hyper-processed foods are one of the biggest drivers of modern health problems. These foods are engineered to be hyper-palatable, shelf-stable, and convenient, but they typically contain refined ingredients, chemical additives, emulsifiers, artificial flavors, and industrial oils that the body was never designed to process regularly.

Common examples include:

- packaged snack foods such as chips, crackers, and cookies
- sugary cereals
- protein bars with long ingredient lists
- flavored yogurts
- frozen convenience meals
- highly processed breads
- sweetened drinks and energy drinks
- packaged desserts and pastries

These foods are designed to override your hunger signals and keep you eating. They often spike blood sugar, increase cravings, disrupt gut health, and crowd out the real food your body needs for energy production. Our goal is to reduce them as much as possible.

## The Hyper-Processed Food Ladder

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### Rung 1: Learn to Identify Hyper-Processed Foods

Start looking closely at ingredient labels.

Hyper-processed foods often contain:

- long ingredient lists
- refined oils such as soybean, corn, or canola oil
- emulsifiers and stabilizers
- artificial flavors or colors
- added sugars or syrups
- gums and thickeners

If the ingredient list reads more like a chemistry experiment than something you would cook with at home, it is hyper-processed. The goal of this rung is simply to train your eye.

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### Rung 2: Track Your Processed Food Intake

For five days, track which foods you eat that come from packages, boxes, or wrappers.

You do not need to judge or change anything yet. Simply gather data.

Pay attention to:

- snacks
- packaged meals
- breakfast foods
- condiments and sauces
- drinks
- protein bars or powders
- frozen meals

Many people are surprised to see how much of their daily food comes from processed sources. Awareness is the first step toward change.

### Rung 3: Remove One Hyper-Processed Food from Your Daily Routine

Look at your food log and identify one processed food you eat most often and replace that item with a whole-food alternative.

Examples:

- eggs instead of cereal
  - plain yogurt with berries instead of flavored yogurt
  - nuts instead of snack bars
  - leftovers instead of packaged lunches
- 

### Rung 4: Upgrade Your Grocery Shopping Habits

During your next grocery trip, spend most of your time shopping the perimeter of the store.

This is where you will find:

- fresh vegetables
- fruit
- eggs
- meat and fish
- dairy
- whole foods

Limit the time you spend in the middle aisles to the items you truly need.

Some packaged foods are far better than others. When you do buy packaged foods, look for:

- short ingredient lists
- recognizable ingredients
- minimal additives

I shared some of my middle aisle choices earlier in the workbook. Convenience can still exist while supporting your health.

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### Rung 5: Replace Two Common Convenience Foods

Choose two packaged foods you rely on regularly and upgrade them.

## Rung 6: Clean Up Your Pantry

Take one afternoon to review your pantry and refrigerator. Hopefully, after following the suggestions so far, there isn't much to clean up, but here's the invitation:

Remove foods that are:

- heavily processed
- full of additives
- high in refined sugar
- difficult to stop eating once you start

What you have available strongly influences your choices.

---

## Rung 7: Build Three Go-To Real Food Meals

Create three simple and quick meals that you genuinely enjoy and can prepare easily with whole foods.

Examples might include:

- eggs, avocado, and sautéed vegetables
- grilled chicken with roasted vegetables
- salmon with quinoa and greens

Write your three meals down and keep the ingredients on hand.

When life gets busy, these meals become your reliable fallback, so you don't default to packaged convenience foods.

---

## Rung 8: Try Two Hyper-Processed-Free Days This Week

Choose any two days this week to eat without hyper-processed foods. Focus on simple meals made from whole or minimally processed ingredients.

This is not a permanent rule or a test of willpower. Think of it as a short experiment to see how your body responds when these foods are removed for a brief period.

Helpful strategies:

- plan ahead so you are not caught without options
- keep meals simple rather than elaborate
- include plenty of protein, healthy fats, and fiber
- expect cravings to fluctuate, especially at first

Notice what changes — or doesn't. You may observe differences in energy, hunger, mood, digestion, sleep, or mental clarity. You might also discover when and why you typically reach for convenience foods.

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### **Rung 9: Extend to Four Consecutive Days Without Hyper-Processed Foods**

Choose four days in a row this week to eat without hyper-processed foods. Plan ahead so that your environment, meals, and snacks support you through the entire stretch.

By this point, you have already tested two days and gathered data. This next rung helps your body move beyond the initial adjustment period and often reveals deeper shifts in energy, hunger signals, sleep, and cravings.

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### **Rung 10: Go One Full Week Without Hyper-Processed Foods**

Now that you've learned to identify and replace hyper-processed foods, challenge yourself to go one full week without them.

You may still use helpful middle-aisle foods such as olives, quinoa, lentils, nuts, or clean marinara sauces, but the goal is to eliminate foods that are highly engineered and heavily processed.

Many people discover that once ultra-processed foods leave the picture, eating becomes simpler and more satisfying.

## The Hyper-Processed Food Ladder Cheat Sheet

- **Rung 1:** Learn to Identify Hyper-Processed Foods

---

- **Rung 2:** Track Your Processed Food Intake

---

- **Rung 3:** Remove One Hyper-Processed Food from Your Daily Routine

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- **Rung 4:** Upgrade Your Grocery Shopping Habits

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- **Rung 5:** Replace Two Common Convenience Foods

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- **Rung 6:** Clean Up Your Pantry

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- **Rung 7:** Build Three Go-To Real Food Meals

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- **Rung 8:** Go Two Days This Week without Hyper-Processed Foods

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- **Rung 9:** Go Four Days without Hyper-Processed Foods

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- **Rung 10:** Go One Full Week Without Hyper-Processed Foods

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# CHAPTER 14

## Moving for Energy

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This chapter is about developing a supportive relationship with movement as a way to restore your energy. Before we get to your movement ladder, I'll remind you that your daily check-ins, capacity accounting, thought redirection, and I Got You Practice are the weatherproofing for your growth. Keep doing the little things because they are the big things.

The Movement Ladder is designed to help you build a sustainable relationship with physical activity, starting exactly where you are today. Rather than pushing yourself into an all-or-nothing exercise plan, this ladder focuses on gradual, meaningful increases in movement that support your energy, capacity, and overall well-being. Each rung represents a small, doable step that can be adjusted to fit your body, your schedule, and your current level of readiness.

You may stay on a rung as long as needed, break steps into smaller pieces, or work on more than one ladder at the same time. The goal is not intensity or perfection, but consistency. Movement should ultimately feel supportive, not punishing or draining. As you collect data about how your body responds, you will be able to choose the next step with confidence, creating a rhythm of activity that strengthens you without overwhelming your system.

As you work with your Movement Ladder, consider using action triggers to make follow-through easier. An action trigger is a simple cue that links your movement to something you already do consistently, such as taking a short walk after breakfast, stretching while your coffee brews, or doing a few minutes of movement before your evening routine begins. By attaching the new behavior to an existing habit, you reduce the need for motivation or decision-making in the moment.

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Keep your triggers specific, realistic, and easy to execute, especially at the beginning. The goal is to build automaticity, not to rely on willpower. If a trigger stops working because your schedule changes or it feels too demanding, adjust it rather than abandoning the practice altogether. Over time, these small, anchored moments of movement add up, helping you create a steady baseline of activity that supports your energy, mood, and resilience.

If your energy is low or your system feels depleted, gentle movement is not only acceptable; it is often the most supportive choice. Intense exercise can place additional demands on an already strained nervous system and may leave you feeling more exhausted, wired, sore, or discouraged rather than stronger. The goal of this ladder is to build capacity, not to push through depletion.

Think of movement as a way to communicate safety and support to your body, not as a test of discipline. Progress comes from matching the demand to your current capacity and increasing gradually as your energy and resilience improve.

As you move up this ladder, the goal is to establish a foundation of consistent, everyday movement that supports your health without overwhelming your system. This ladder is intentionally focused on gentle, sustainable activity that can be done daily. Walking, mobility work, light strength exercises, stretching, and other moderate forms of movement help maintain circulation, joint health, mood, and energy while building the capacity needed for more demanding activity later.

If and when you feel ready to incorporate more intense exercise, it should complement this foundation rather than replace it. Higher-intensity workouts place greater stress on the body and require adequate recovery. For most people, this type of exercise is best limited to about three to five days per week, depending on your energy, fitness level, sleep, and overall resilience. On the remaining days, continue with gentler movement to support recovery and maintain consistency without overloading your system.

Pay attention to how your body responds. Signs that intensity is appropriate include stable or improving energy, good sleep, manageable soreness, and the ability to recover fully before your next session. If you notice persistent fatigue, irritability, sleep disruption, increased pain,

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or a drop in motivation, these are signals to reduce intensity and return to a lower rung for a period of time.

Think of everyday movement as your baseline for long-term well-being. More intense exercise can be layered on top when your body is ready, but it is not required now for meaningful progress. Consistent, supportive movement done regularly will carry you much farther than short bursts of extreme effort followed by exhaustion.

## The Movement Ladder

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### Rung 1: Move on Three Days This Week

Choose a small movement session on three days. Three to five minutes is enough.

Examples:

- a short walk
  - marching in place
  - gentle stretching
  - a few yoga poses
  - a brief video
  - dancing to one song
- 

### Rung 2: Keep Three Days, Add Mobility or Stretching

Stay at three days and include at least one simple mobility or stretching movement.

Examples:

- neck or shoulder rolls
  - gentle side bends
  - ankle circles
  - light hip movement
  - stretching tight areas
- 

### Rung 3: Move on Four Days This Week

Increase to four days. Keep sessions brief and manageable.

Mix options based on how you feel that day. Some days may be walking, others stretching, and others a short video.

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### Rung 4: Four Days, Make It Easy to Start

Stay at four days but increase your time by a couple of minutes.

## Rung 5: Move on Five Days This Week

Choose five days to move your body. Five to ten minutes is enough to support energy.

Include a combination of movement types:

- walking
  - gentle yoga
  - mobility exercises
  - dancing
  - light household activity
  - stretching routines
- 

## Rung 6: Five Days, Vary the Type of Movement

Remain at five days but add a couple of minutes to your sessions or break it up into two sessions during the day.

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## Rung 7: Move on Six Days This Week

Increase to six days. Focus on reliability rather than duration.

Have a backup plan for low-energy days, such as a few minutes of stretching, mobility work, or slow walking indoors.

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## Rung 8: Six Days, Allow One Longer or More Engaged Session

Stay at six days. If energy allows, let one session last a little longer or feel slightly more active.

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## Rung 9: Move Every Day

Include some form of movement daily, even if it is very small.

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## Rung 10: Choose Your Path Forward

You have now built a consistent movement foundation. From here, the goal is to continue in ways that match your energy, interests, and goals.

You might choose to:

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- maintain your current routine
- gradually increase duration
- add strength training
- explore new activities
- join a class or group
- spend more time outdoors
- train toward a personal goal
- continue using short videos for guidance

Let your body's signals guide you. Increased energy, improved recovery, and a sense of readiness suggest you can expand. If fatigue, pain, or overwhelm increase, scale back and stabilize.

Choose a direction that feels both meaningful and sustainable, and allow your movement practice to evolve as your capacity grows.

## The Movement Ladder Cheat Sheet

- **Rung 1:** Move on Three Days This Week

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- **Rung 2:** Keep Three Days, Add Mobility or Stretching

---

- **Rung 3:** Move on Four Days This Week

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- **Rung 4:** Four Days, Make It Easy to Start

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- **Rung 5:** Move on Five Days This Week

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- **Rung 6:** Five Days, Vary the Type of Movement

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- **Rung 7:** Move on Six Days This Week

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- **Rung 8:** Six Days, Allow One Longer or More Engaged Session

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- **Rung 9:** Move Every Day

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- **Rung 10:** Choose Your Path Forward

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# CHAPTERS 15 & 16

## Hydration and Supplementation

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This ladder combines hydration and supplementation because, for most people, improvements in these areas can be made through a relatively small number of clear, practical steps. Rather than separating them into two lengthy processes, they are paired here to keep the work focused, manageable, and flexible. Each could easily stand alone as a five-rung ladder, but together they form a simple pathway for strengthening two foundational supports of energy, recovery, and overall health.

As with the other ladders, there is no requirement to move quickly. You may stay on any rung as long as needed, break a step into smaller pieces, or pause entirely if your capacity is limited. The goal is steady progress that fits your life, not rushing to completion. Some people will move through these changes in a few weeks, while others may take months to fully integrate them. Both approaches are valid.

Think of this ladder as a menu of supportive actions rather than a strict sequence. You are free to adjust the pace, repeat steps, or work on only one aspect at a time. What matters most is building habits that are sustainable and meaningful for you, creating a reliable foundation of hydration and nutritional support that your body can depend on day after day.

Adequate hydration and appropriate supplementation directly affect how your body functions day to day, including energy production, mental clarity, digestion, sleep quality, muscle function, and recovery. If you have been under-fueled, chronically stressed, or depleted for a long time, even modest improvements in these areas can make daily life feel more manageable.

## The Supplements Ladder

The goal of this ladder is to close nutrient gaps with the guidance of your clinician. Start with research and approval, then add only what you and your doctor decide is right. Let your body lead. Keep each step small and steady.

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### Rung 1: Research and medical clearance

- Make a list of supplements that interest you based on this chapter. Creatine, fish oil (omega 3), vitamin D3, magnesium glycinate or citrate, methylated B complex, zinc, Urolithin A (found at [www.timelinenutrition.com](http://www.timelinenutrition.com))
  - Gather your medication list and any recent labs.
  - Meet with your healthcare provider to confirm which items, doses, and timings are appropriate for you.
  - Choose a high-quality brand for each approved item. Look for third-party testing such as USP, NSF, or ConsumerLab. Four brands I always trust are Pure Encapsulations, Thorne, Designs for Health, and Life Extension. These companies prioritize high standards and purity, so you can feel good about what you're putting into your body. They aren't the only options, but if you're looking for recommendations, these brands are well known for their high quality.
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### Rung 2: Add the first one or two

- Start the first one or two approved supplements.
- Anchor them to a daily cue such as coffee time or breakfast.
- Consider my system for remembering to take them. I purchased a package of tiny cups that restaurants serve ketchup in, and I portion them out for 30 days. I keep the tiny cups stacked inside each other in a small bin in the cupboard next to the coffee. If I had to open the 10 or 12 separate bottles of supplements I take each day, I would probably miss a lot of days. My system makes it automatic and easy!

### **Rung 3: Add the next one or two**

- Keep your anchor habit.
  - Add one or two more approved items.
  - Watch for benefits and any side effects, which typically take several weeks.
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### **Rung 4: Add the final one or two**

- Introduce the remaining approved items, or hold steady if your body asks for more time.
  - Recheck fit and dose with your clinician if anything feels off.
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### **Rung 5: Stabilize and review**

- Set a 6 to 12 week follow up with your clinician for dose checks and any labs they recommend.
- Create a refill rhythm and a small travel kit so consistency stays easy. I purchased two months of all of my supplements at the beginning and have them all on auto-renew every 30 days so I can always fill my tiny cups 30 days in advance.

## **The Hydration Ladder**

Goal: Build steady, adequate hydration throughout the day so your body has the fluids it needs for energy, circulation, temperature regulation, digestion, and mental clarity. The aim is consistency, not perfection. By the top of this ladder, hydration should feel automatic rather than something you have to think about.

General guideline: Most women do well with about 90 ounces of fluids per day (about 11 standard 8-ounce glasses), and most men with about 125 ounces per day (about 15–16 glasses). Adjust up or down based on body size, activity level, climate, medications, and individual needs.

What counts: Water, sparkling water, mineral water, herbal tea, coffee, tea, milk, and other non-alcoholic beverages all contribute to hydration.

## Rung 1: Know Your Baseline

- Begin tracking how many ounces of fluids you drink each day.
  - Compare this to the general guideline to estimate your current gap.
  - Check urine color when you use the bathroom. Pale yellow usually indicates adequate hydration. Dark yellow suggests you may need more fluids. Crystal clear all day may indicate overhydration and electrolyte dilution.
  - Choose a bottle or cup you enjoy using so drinking feels easier.
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## Rung 2: Add a Morning Anchor

- Drink one glass of fluid immediately upon waking and one with your first meal.
  - If plain water is not appealing, try sparkling water, herbal tea, or water with lemon or fruit.
  - Continue tracking your intake.
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## Rung 3: Spread It Through the Day

- Include a glass with your main meals.
  - Add a glass before or after movement.
  - During an afternoon slump, try water or herbal tea before reaching for caffeine.
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## Rung 4: Close the Gap

- Review your tracking data and determine your current average intake.
- Compare this to your hydration target. How far away are you?
- Decide where to place the additional ounces you need so they fit naturally into your day.

Examples:

- add a mid-morning drink

- drink during your commute
- pair fluids with existing habits such as meetings or breaks
- use reminders, time-marked bottles, or visual cues

The goal is to distribute fluids in ways that feel easy rather than forced.

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## Rung 5: Anchor Your System

- Keep your hydration anchors consistent each day (morning, meals, movement, etc.).
- Adjust intake on active, hot, or high-stress days.
- Ease up in the evening if needed to protect sleep.
- Create a travel plan so hydration remains steady away from home — bring a bottle and identify go-to options such as mineral water, sparkling water, or herbal tea.

## The Supplements Ladder Cheat Sheet

- **Rung 1:** Research and medical clearance
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- **Rung 2:** Add the first one or two
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- **Rung 3:** Add the next one or two
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- **Rung 4:** Add the remaining items
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- **Rung 5:** Stabilize and review
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## The Hydration Ladder Cheat Sheet

- **Rung 1:** Know Your Baseline
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- **Rung 2:** Add a Morning Anchor
- 

- **Rung 3:** Spread It Through the Day
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- **Rung 4:** Close the Gap
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- **Rung 5:** Anchor Your System
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# CHAPTER 17

## Lowering Your Toxic Burden

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When it comes to detoxification, it's important to build your capacity for change slowly and steadily. Think of your detox pathways like your outdoor garbage cans; they're designed to handle a certain amount of waste at a time. If you suddenly try to clear out every bit of trash from your house all at once, the bins overflow, spilling garbage everywhere and creating a bigger mess. In the same way, drastic detox protocols can overwhelm your body, making you feel worse instead of better. That's why I recommend a ladder-building approach: start with small, manageable shifts that support your body's natural detox systems, and gradually increase your efforts as your capacity grows.

I've intentionally placed this chapter at the end of the book because by now, you've already been building a solid foundation. You've likely started making meaningful changes to your daily habits—nourishing your body, supporting your nervous system, and reducing the toxic load through food and lifestyle choices. These changes have already begun to support your natural detoxification channels in a sustainable, effective way. Now, with this groundwork in place, your body is better prepared to take the next steps without becoming overwhelmed. This chapter isn't about starting from scratch; it's about building on what you've already been cultivating.

Using your ladder-building approach for each of the steps listed below, decide how you will integrate the steps in a way that feels manageable and meaningful. You can treat each step as a rung to implement as is, or you can break the steps down into as many rungs as you need to fit the capacity and energy you have available to you right now.

## Your Toxic Load Reduction Ladder

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### Rung 1: Map Your Top Exposures (Awareness Week)

For the next seven days, pay attention to your routine exposures in four main areas:

- **Food** – Notice how often you eat processed foods, takeout, or packaged items.
- **Water** – Consider the source of your drinking water (tap, filtered, bottled).
- **Air/Dust** – Do you use candles or air fresheners, or have dust buildup indoors?
- **Products** – Look at personal care and cleaning products you use most often.

As you track, write down anything you use daily or frequently. At the end of the week, circle three areas where you see the easiest opportunity to make a change (your “easy wins”).

To help with this, use the Environmental Working Group’s website ([ewg.org](http://ewg.org)). You can search their databases for:

- Household cleaners
- Personal care and beauty products
- Tap water quality reports (by zip code)
- Ratings for foods and produce

This will give you a clear picture of which exposures matter most for you and where you can begin reducing your toxic load without overwhelm.

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### Rung 2: Reduce Plastic Use (Even BPA-free)

Don’t microwave or heat food/drink in plastic. Try to reduce your exposure to plastic as much as possible. Store food in glass/steel; use a reusable metal/glass bottle. Transfer hot takeout from plastic right away.

### **Rung 3: Fragrance Audit (home & car)**

Remove/retire plug-ins, scented candles, and room/car sprays. Consider natural essential oils or a diffuser to add scent.

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### **Rung 4: Simple Water Upgrade and Smarter Seafood**

Add a certified filter (pitcher or under-sink) and change cartridges on time. Rinse bottles daily. I personally use the reverse osmosis system from Aquatru.

Swap high-mercury fish (e.g., big tuna, swordfish) for salmon, sardines, anchovies, and trout. If using canned tuna, look for Safecatch or other brands that do rigorous mercury testing.

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### **Rung 5: Antioxidant Rich Fruits and Vegetables and Lower Pesticide Consumption**

Increase your consumption of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables and choose organic for your most-eaten items using the Dirty Dozen/Clean Fifteen list from the Environmental Working Group. This lowers pesticide exposure while keeping it realistic and affordable.

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### **Rung 6: Sweat It Out**

Support detox through sweating. Options include regular movement and exercise, sauna sessions, or hot baths. Each of these may support your body to excrete heavy metals and persistent pollutants. Start with what feels doable a few times per week and build from there.

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### **Rung 7: Create Your Product Swap Plan**

This week is about mapping out what you will eventually replace, not rushing to do it all at once. Start by making a list of the personal care and household cleaning products you use most often. Write down everything from your daily lotion, shampoo, and deodorant to laundry detergent, dish soap, and surface cleaners.

Next, use the Environmental Working Group's database ([ewg.org](http://ewg.org)) to look up each product and see how it rates for safety. Circle the ones with the highest concern ratings, and make

notes about safer alternatives you'd like to try. The goal is to create your own *Product Swap Plan* so you know exactly what will be replaced as each item runs out.

This approach prevents overwhelm and makes it easier to stay consistent. When the time comes to buy something new, you'll already know which products align with your decision to reduce toxins and what you're choosing to allow in and on your body and in your home.

### Quick Reference: Top 10 Ingredients to Avoid

*(Keep this on your phone for shopping! This is not an exhaustive list, but these are among the most common and concerning ingredients you'll see in everyday products.)*

1. **Fragrance / Parfum** – Hidden chemicals linked to hormone disruption, allergies, and headaches.
2. **Phthalates (DBP, DEHP, DEP, DMP, etc.)** – Found in plastics and fragrances; known endocrine disruptors.
3. **Parabens (methyl-, propyl-, butyl-, isobutyl-)** – Preservatives that mimic estrogen and may affect hormone balance.
4. **Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS) & Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES)** – Harsh detergents. SLS strips oils from the skin and disrupts the protective barrier, increasing absorption of other chemicals. SLES is often contaminated with 1,4-dioxane and ethylene oxide, both linked to cancer.
5. **Triclosan / Triclocarban** – Antibacterial agents linked to hormone disruption and antibiotic resistance.
6. **Formaldehyde & Formaldehyde Releasers (DMDM hydantoin, quaternium-15, imidazolidinyl urea)** – Known carcinogens used as preservatives.
7. **Oxybenzone & Octinoxate** – Common in sunscreens; linked to hormone disruption and coral reef damage.
8. **Toluene** – Found in nail products and hair dyes; affects the nervous system and fetal development.

9. **Polyethylene Glycol (PEGs)** – Can be contaminated with carcinogens (ethylene oxide, 1,4-dioxane).

10. **BHA & BHT** – Synthetic antioxidants used as preservatives; potential hormone disruptors and linked to organ toxicity.

Tip: If you see any of these on a label, put it back on the shelf and look for a safer option. Use the EWG Healthy Living app for quick scans when in doubt.

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### **Rung 8: Support Your Liver (Food + Supplements)**

Add detox-supporting foods like cruciferous vegetables, leafy greens, garlic, and turmeric. Talk with your healthcare provider about supplements such as milk thistle, selenium, or vitamin C, which are well-studied for supporting liver function.

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### **Rung 9: Air, Dust, and Moisture Check**

Open windows when outdoor air is good, replace HVAC filters, vacuum with a HEPA filter, damp-dust weekly, and keep humidity  $\leq 50\%$ . Remove shoes at the door to limit tracked-in pesticides and metals.

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### **Rung 10: 14–21 Day “Free Period,” then reintroduce**

Minimize/skip added sugar, gluten, and dairy for 2–3 weeks to lower internal load. Reintroduce one category at a time (wait ~3 days between) while noting energy, mood, skin, digestion, sleep, joints. Review chapter 17 for more details on a Free Period.

## Conclusion

# BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

This is where we take everything you've learned, practiced, and explored over these weeks and turn it into something you can carry forward. Integration is how you deepen the work so it becomes second nature. The following invitations and reflections will help you see how far you've come, notice where you want to keep growing, and create a clear, compassionate plan for what's next.

### 1. Five Things You've Done Well

Start by acknowledging and celebrating your progress. Write down five things you've done well over the course of the book. These can be big or small, such as completing every chapter, noticing your nervous system state more quickly, using a somatic practice when you were triggered, respecting your capacity in a situation that would have drained you before, or simply showing up week after week.

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**Reflect further:**

- What do these five things show you about your growth?

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- How do they reflect the trust you've started to build with yourself?

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- Which one feels the most meaningful right now?

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## 2. Five Things You Want to Focus On

Next, choose five areas where you want to keep your attention, especially with your daily check-ins and thought work.

**Some ideas to consider:**

- Becoming more consistent with your five daily check-ins
- Meeting a particular thought pattern with more curiosity and less judgment
- Noticing your nervous system state earlier in the day
- Pausing before reacting when you feel activated
- Practicing compassion toward yourself when you stumble

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**Reflect on these:**

- Why do these five areas matter most to you right now?

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- What would steady progress in these areas look and feel like?

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- How can you remind yourself to stay grounded in compassion as you practice?

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### 3. How Life Is Different

Look back to where you were when you started this workbook. How is life different now? Consider your body, your thoughts, your energy, your choices, and your relationships.

**Questions to explore:**

- What feels lighter or more possible now?

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- What situations feel less overwhelming or more manageable?

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- How do you respond to yourself differently when things get hard?

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- What has surprised you the most about these shifts?

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## 4. Clarifying Ongoing Support

Support is what turns these shifts into lasting change. Reflect on what has been most helpful to you so far and what you need moving forward.

**Prompts to guide you:**

- Which part of the program — the live sessions, the somatic practices, the ladders, or the community — felt most supportive?

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- What structure or accountability would help you stay connected in the months ahead?

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- Which options feel right for your next step: joining the weekly community meetings, one-on-one sessions, a small group mastermind, or a workshop to deepen your practices? Visit [www.LoriMontry.com](http://www.LoriMontry.com) for more options.
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This reflection is not about pressure. It's about clarity. Knowing what kind of support you want makes it easier to keep choosing yourself in a way that feels steady and sustainable.

## 5. Choosing Your Next Step

Now that you've completed the workbook, you stand at an important threshold. This is Phase One of the Freedom Formula, and from here you have several options for continuing forward:

1. **Remain in Phase One** — Continue deepening your steadiness and practicing the protocols until you feel solid and grounded.
2. **Step into Phase Two** — Begin discovering your Inner Compass, exploring who you truly are beneath the adaptations, and learning to live with greater authenticity and purpose.
3. **Look Ahead to Phase Three** — Envision the life you will create as you align your choices, relationships, and work with your authentic self.

You can check-out these options on the website. After you do, I invite you to sit with these options and ask yourself: *Which step is best for me today?*

To keep this process alive, consider adding a recurring date on your calendar every two or three weeks, in addition to your weekly CEO time, to pause, check in with yourself, and ask: *Am I ready to move into Phase Two?*

Keep coming back to this question periodically. You'll know when it's time to move into the next level. Becoming You - living authentically and purposefully, free from the old stories and limitations of the past.

### If You Choose to Remain in Phase One

Remaining in Phase One is not standing still. It is choosing to deepen the work you've already begun. This is the season where you allow your nervous system to anchor in the steadiness you've been cultivating so it becomes more familiar, more natural, and more accessible in daily life.

Here's what it can look like:

- **Revisit the chapters of the book with fresh eyes.** You are not the same person you were when you first interacted with them. Your system has changed. You've built awareness and capacity. Material that felt overwhelming before may now feel clear, and concepts

that seemed abstract may now land in a very personal, embodied way. It may feel like new information because you are meeting it from a different place in your growth.

- **Reinforce the Protocols:** Give yourself more time with the ladders, the check-ins, and the practices. Some weeks you may choose to hold steady at a particular rung rather than moving forward. That anchoring is progress.
- **Integrate at Your Own Pace:** Notice where in your life you're beginning to respond differently — in your thoughts, your relationships, and your choices. Let those shifts sink in instead of rushing to what's next.

Staying in Phase One allows you to make the work your own. It gives your nervous system space to build safety and steadiness as a foundation so that when you are ready for Phase Two, you move into it with trust rather than pressure.

Trust yourself and allow your path to unfold in its own timing. Continue your five-times-per-day check-ins, your weekly CEO time, and your commitment to yourself. These practices will pay off in ways you can only begin to imagine. There's always more to explore at [www.LoriMontry.com](http://www.LoriMontry.com).

This is not the end of the work. It is the beginning of a new way of living. You now have tools, awareness, and a deeper relationship with yourself that can guide you through whatever comes next. There will still be challenges, uncertain moments, and times when you forget what you know. Each time you return to these practices, you strengthen your capacity, your steadiness, and your trust in yourself. You are no longer at the mercy of old patterns. You have options and new found agency. You have a path forward. Keep showing up for yourself, one choice at a time, and you will continue to build a life that reflects who you truly are and what matters most to you.

I'm proud of your efforts, and you should be too.

See you soon.