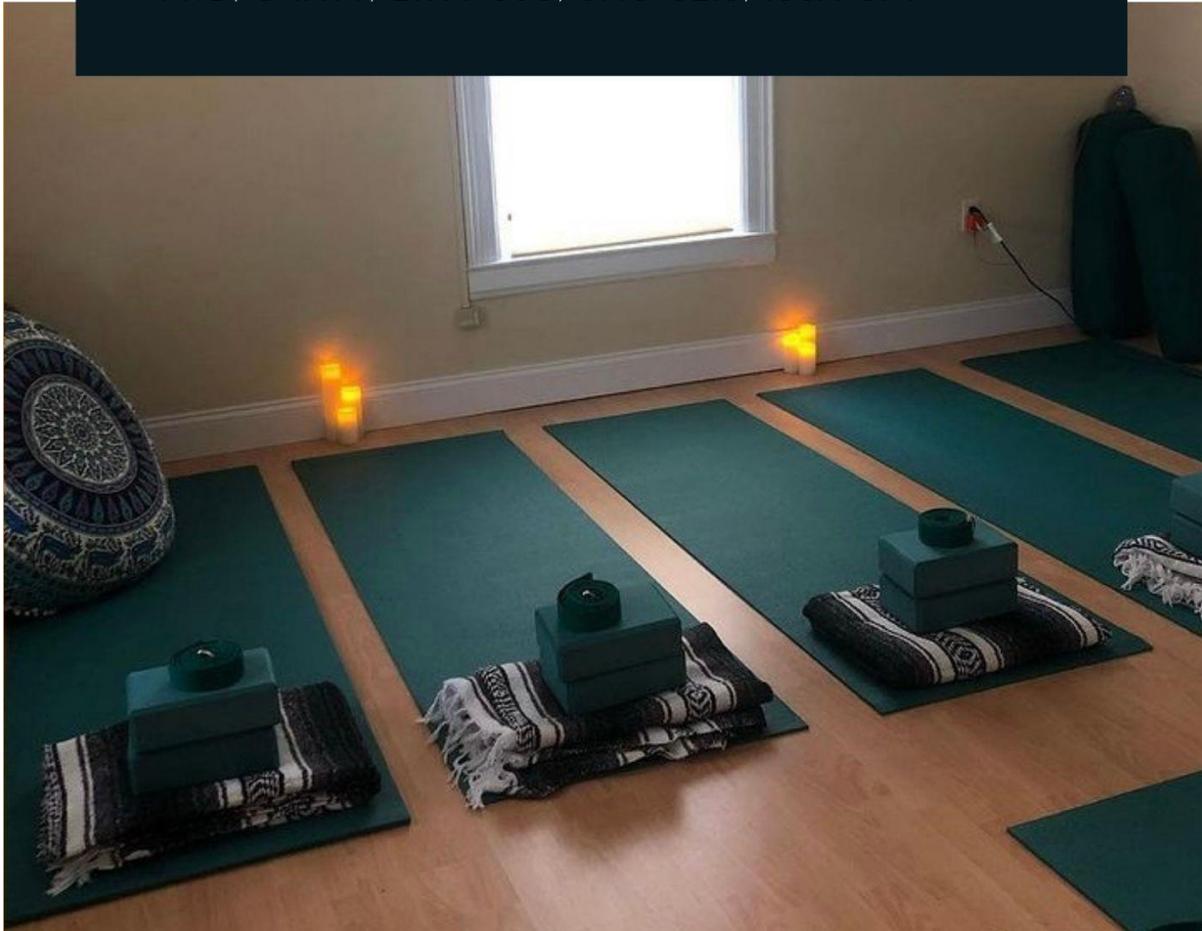


**STOP ACCEPTING FATIGUE, CHRONIC PAIN &
FEELING BLUE AS INEVITABLE WITH AGING!**

**RESILIENCE MIND-BODY
PRACTICES™ TO**

**FEEL BETTER,
LIVE BETTER!**

BY SHARON L. KANFOUSH,
PHD, C-IAYT, ERYT-500, SMC-CEI3, ISSA-CPT



Resilience Mind-Body Practices™ to Feel Better, Live Better!

STOP Accepting Fatigue, Chronic Pain & Feeling Blue
as Inevitable with Aging!

Sharon Kanfoush, Ph.D., C-IAYT, ERYT-500, SMC-CEI3, ISSA-CPT

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Utica, New York

I would like to thank my family for their support of this endeavor, my mother who continually modeled ongoing gentle, live-able persistence toward wellness, several friends who showed me that wellness can indeed be had in middle age, and several colleagues who showed me that even busy working parents can do incredible things like run marathons if they decide to.

And I extend a special thanks to my early wellness teachers who provided, with both gentle compassion and some tough love, moments of challenge and moments of ease on and off the bike and mat in ways that powerfully motivated me to do some honest self-examination and make some much-needed changes.

MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

The following information is intended for general information purposes only. Individuals should always see their healthcare provider before administering any suggestions made in this book. Any application of the material set forth in the following pages is at the reader's discretion and is their sole responsibility.

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Preface: Welcome!

This easy-to-digest philosophy and guide is for people in middle age – or who are not yet, but feel like it – who have neglected their health while busy taking care of everyone else. It will teach them – it will teach YOU – that it is not too late and that surprisingly small, doable, steps can be turned into daily habits to get out of pain and feel better.

Using a science-based but heart-centered approach, I wrote *Feel Better, Live Better!* as part of my own long, ongoing journey away from physical and emotional pain toward a much better life in which I made a choice to – and was then able to – stop simply accepting physical aches and pains and emotional stress, doubts, and sadness as a normal part of entering middle age.

Had I not made that choice and then devoured all the wellness information, from both Western medicine and alternative/complementary/holistic wellness, that I could get my hands on, I have no doubt my life right now would be a very different one. A very painful one. A very sad one.

But I was fortunate to have had an instant in which I hit a personal low that truly shocked and frightened me into taking action. I took one small step forward that turned out to be one of the biggest, best steps of my life. And the one step turned into two, and three, then four. And then so many, many more. Wonderful steps that have turned into a wonderful, explorative, playful journey and a truly new way of life – without giving up who am or the life I built with my family.

My wellness journey at times looked traditional, with time in the gym or on the road running, but many more times it has been anything but the traditional slogging it out in the gym or running. I was fortunate to have stumbled on different approaches. That worked! Approaches that were more gentle, more realistic, more doable for me – and I think more doable for many of you! And as a wellness practitioner, I've successfully used these approaches with my clients.

Many people have reached a point at which slogging it out at the gym for long amounts of time and at high intensity is not only not doable but is actually doing more harm than good by adding stress – physical and emotional – to an already stressed out mind-body system. Pumping out even more damaging cortisol. Creating even more tightness, stiffness, aches, and physical and emotional pain. Causing even more injuries and setbacks, overwhelm and failures in a way that is almost certain to derail you, defeat you and leave you simply again accepting physical aches and pain and emotional stress, doubts, and sadness.

I am here to tell you, to convince you, that there is indeed a better way. A much, much better way. And I am here not only to convince and motivate you, but to teach and empower you to be able to get started, stay started, and keep moving forward on your own wonderful journey away from physical and emotional pain toward a much better life!

Sharon Kanfoush

Chapter 1:

My Story & A Different Approach: Resilience Mind-Body Tools™

MYTH #1: It's too late to make real progress now, so why bother.

"We cannot start over. But we can begin now and make a new ending."

~ Zig Ziglar

My Story: What I Did Right

For years I worked obsessively toward my goals of pursuing graduate school and landing a job as a professor at a small teaching-centered college, along with raising a family. And I succeeded! Then... my hair fell out. Well, some of it fell out. In clumps. Along with that, at just 40 years of age, every muscle and joint ached every minute of every day. Following a visit to a doctor and a few tests, I was told "Things are normal." Really?? They sure didn't seem normal. I had to wake up to the fact that while my studious book-worm lifestyle had garnered me the career I had dreamed of, it had not served me well with regard to my health. If I wanted to enjoy the fruits of my labor and enjoy time with my wonderful husband and kids, it was time for me to make some serious changes.

I had played field hockey and ran track in high school, both rather poorly, and only to be sure I had extra-curricular activities on my college applications. I had most certainly never been an athlete or fitness buff. So where to begin? ...I accidentally started perfectly. My then young son and daughter were playing youth hockey, and my husband – who is from Buffalo, New York and practically born with ice skates on – was teaching kids' learn-to-skate and coaching youth hockey. I had never learned to ice skate but decided I would kill two birds with one stone and learn to skate to get fitter while also gaining a skill I could enjoy with the family. So, at 40 years old, I started going to adults-only open rink time so I wouldn't get run over by speedy kids. I pushed the bar around the rink just like my kids did when they first learned to skate at 4 years old. With time, it worked. And along the way I discovered I really enjoyed it.

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can." ~ Arthur Ashe

Why did I say I accidentally started perfectly? Because I was quite overweight, and ice skating was super gentle on my achy knees. And it was also something with which I could start small and go at my own pace. I eventually graduated from pushing the bar and could skate without assistance, at which point it evolved into a genuine fitness routine for me. At about the same time, I purchased a used elliptical and told myself I only had to use it 10 minutes a day... but every day. Again, I accidentally started perfectly by keeping my initial goal very small and

achievable. With both, because they were enjoyable rather than daunting, I was remarkably consistent. Without having ever heard the quotation below by Naeem Calloway, I had embraced it. And it worked!

“Sometimes the smallest step in the right direction ends up being the biggest step of your life. Tiptoe if you must, but take a step.” ~ Naeem Calloway

I began to enjoy ice skating so much that I joined what we called “old lady hockey”. It was coed adult hockey, but it was actually all women in our 40s and one lone man also in his 40s. The man was faster and more skilled than the rest of us. But he had recently made the move to the men’s hockey only to return immediately with a gigantic, ugly yellow-brown bruise on his ankle where he had been on the receiving end of an extremely hard-hit puck. Happy to be back with us, we all donned hockey gear and helmets for the only available open ice time at 10:00pm on Wednesday nights. It. Was. A. Blast! Being padded and with a helmet removed fear of falling, so I could really test out some speed. Well, my snail’s version of speed. Truth be told, I was so slow and poor at maneuvering that our hockey games were for me largely just laps from one end of the rink to the other trying to catch up with where the action was. But it was great joint-lubricating, muscle-strengthening movement and cardio all disguised as even greater fun.

From there I began jogging. Our small city of Utica, New York hosts an annual 15K race, the Boilermaker, each July. I had grown up watching those races and cheering on the runners. Since its start in the 1970s, it had grown to over 14,000 runners including several elite runners each year who use it as a training run for larger, more prestigious races. The Boilermaker accurately boasts some of the biggest and most enthusiastic spectator support of any running race in the nation, and it is followed by a huge party and concert at the Utica Brewery, complete with flyovers by military F-16s. It was something I had always dreamed of participating in rather than watching. I worked my way up to running the accompanying 5K event a few times, including a couple wonderful times with my teenage kids accompanying me. Then I trained for and successfully ran the beloved 15K twice. Well, that huge crowd support is incredibly infectious... so I then set my sights on a marathon.

Truth be told, it was far too early in my running “career” to attempt such an ambitious undertaking – especially in light of my very sedentary past not too long ago. I was using a method developed by Olympic medalist Jeff Galloway called the walk:run method in which you repeatedly alternate walking for a certain time interval and then running for a certain time interval. I had found it was a method that worked wonderfully for me with my sedentary past. I could build distance and build endurance and health without the tremendous pounding and wear and tear on my joints that continuous running would bring. After much experimentation, I had found a 45:75 ratio of 45 seconds running and 75 seconds walking worked well for me – resulting in substantially less pain yet, shockingly, the same pace as my continuous running. I say shockingly, but Jeff Galloway had argued that would in fact be the case. It’s a remarkable

method that I highly recommend to everyone. Nonetheless, it was far too early in my running “career” to attempt the substantial distance of a marathon.

But I had gone to a Christmas party hosted by one of the marathoning coworkers and attended by several of the others. I admired them tremendously for their marathoning pursuits. But, at that point, I certainly had no similar ambitions. At the party, I walked into the kitchen where two of the marathoners was chatting with another coworker and heard them finish saying, “But she doesn’t really run. She does walk:run.” I was so shocked and put off by that comment! If someone is doing something in an attempt to improve their health, why the heck does it matter the means by which they’re going about it?! I left the party later that evening still bothered about that comment and ruminating about its unnecessary judgmentalism. And then... a whole week later... I realized they had been talking about me!! I know. It should have been obvious at the time; I’m not even sure why it wasn’t. But the minute I realized it, I started surfing online for a marathon that seemed logistically doable and had a very long time limit. And I signed up for a marathon that day that would take place the following October as well as a half marathon in May.

Still overweight, I needed a way to get more training in without more pounding on my still somewhat tender joints, so I began spinning (indoor cycling). I thought old lady hockey and running the Boilermaker were very fun, but spinning – choreographed to loud music with an instructor yelling commands at me – was an insane adrenaline rush! So before long I was hooked on that too. My spinning instructor, who was also a yoga teacher, suggested I do yoga as a way to help stretch for my running, so I jumped into that too. And I began doing half marathons on my elliptical to earn “virtual race” medals – discovering I am quite motivated by race bling! Both the heart-pounding spinning and the bling-fueled elliptical half marathons were also a great way to train through the snowy, icy winters of central New York.

As soon as things began to thaw, I got out on the road and followed a Jeff Galloway marathon walk:run training plan to the letter. I did all of the runs, with a long run each week building in distance. I worked all the way up to the final three 20-mile runs, truly astonishing to me! But unfortunately ended up aggravating a knee on the last 20-mile training run just three weeks before the marathon. I was heartbroken. But I decided at 45 years old, I might never get another chance. I dug in my heels and successfully completed it – the Empire State Marathon in Syracuse, New York – as the world’s most proud last place finisher ever with a whopping time of six and a half hours!

Nonetheless, through it all I had fallen fully in love with movement and how it made me feel, physically and mentally. I became a certified spinning instructor in 2016 and yoga teacher in 2017 and opened Sharon Kanfoush Wellness, LLC in 2017 and then the Resilience Body-Mind Institute in 2021 to help others discover movement that can make them feel good. Along the way I added more training in new modalities whenever I saw a need in my clients that did not seem fully or best met by those I already had – loving every minute of it as the perfect marriage between my old book-worm self who loves to learn and my new self who loves to move and help others find that love.

My Story: What I Did Wrong

It was a journey I will always cherish, for sure. Alongside it, however, life was not all rosy. I was still working too hard at my academic job – for years taking on more than I could reasonably handle. My parents, then in their 60s, had a motor cycle accident that knocked Mom for a real loop for a couple years. My brother was battling prostate cancer, successfully I am now so relieved to report. My grandmother suffered some truly heart-wrenching complications of diabetes. And severe weather nearly destroyed my parents' lakefront cabin in the Adirondack Mountains at which I had spent weekends every summer since I was 2 years old. It eventually just all reached an ugly head that I found myself ill-equipped to manage. I imploded. Crashed and burned. I became nearly non-functional at my job, and I was not in control of my emotions. It was not pretty.

In addition to a chronic habit of biting off more than I could chew at work, it turns out the fitness activities at which I had been working hard and loving so much were not all good. Without realizing it, I had been trying desperately to “burn off” the stress. With the spinning in particular. The more stressed I felt, the harder I would push since the adrenaline rush would make me feel so great. For a bit anyway. In addition, the harder I rode, the more praise I received from my instructor and fellow riders. I had never been good at anything physical before, and the praise fed right in to the ego of academic overachiever me. In hindsight, I can now see I was actually nearly injuring myself in every 5:30am ride. And even though I mostly managed to somehow escape physical injury from those over-the-top rides, they were contributing significantly to my stress rather than burning it off – by pumping out massive quantities of cortisol, the stress hormone – the last thing I needed.

With my implosion forcing the issue, I sought help. I was not experiencing merely stress, but I was suffering burnout and a full-blown anxiety disorder that was rapidly evolving into depression. I had been experiencing chronic, severe abdominal pain, a racing heart, and insomnia so bad that near the time of my implosion I was only able to sleep 3 hours a night. Ouch. I had undergone numerous medical tests, thoroughly convinced there was something terribly wrong physically. Nope. It was mental, emotional, but much of it showed up in the body.

I had also, without even realizing it, been cancelling my college classes every Wednesday for 8 full weeks! I truly had no awareness I was doing it. I sat in the main office where there are windows and people (my office is an isolated, windowless underground cave) having an afternoon coffee with the secretaries as I had done almost every day for almost 20 years. When I went to leave, I said “I’ll see you tomorrow.” One of our secretaries said, “Don’t you mean Thursday?” I looked at her puzzled and said, “Isn’t today Tuesday?” She responded, “Yes. But you’ve been calling in every Wednesday.” I was STUNNED. I truly had no idea that I had been canceling every Wednesday. Apparently, I was unable to make it through more than two days in a row before needing to “check out”. I’m frankly, but so tremendously grateful, I didn’t get pulled in by my dean for a harsh tongue lashing and formal reprimand. And it certainly was not at all fair to the students that had me that semester, for which I was so sorry

and sad. I soon thereafter opted to seek out the dean myself to explain what had been going on and, while there, had a complete and utter meltdown of epic proportions in her office. Her response? “I’m actually surprised it didn’t happen sooner,” she said. Thank. God. For such an understanding boss. We together worked on a plan to use some teaching release time I had earned but never taken to lighten my absurd workload for the next two semesters to enable desperately needed recovery and recharge.

I went on anxiety medication for a bit to get me over the initial crisis. I stopped spinning and running altogether and stuck with yoga and meditation. And, importantly, I found a therapist who was fabulous. Working with Joanna, who I continue to this day to recommend highly to anyone and everyone, I realized something that in hindsight seems so obvious and simple: the source of much of the stress that had buried me to the point it evolved into an anxiety disorder was my own doing. The endless quest for achievement that I had embraced as a young child, that had driven me to be high school valedictorian, that had driven me to get a doctorate, that had driven me to want to “achieve” the goal of running the hometown 15K and then a marathon. That had made me into the quintessential “yes woman” at work, taking on more and more tasks whenever asked. Yep. All me. But the good news was it was also me who could now start to say no, start to trim back, start over, and start using a different approach.

A Different Approach

This book is an overview of an underlying philosophy (described in chapter 1) and discussion and description of several fundamental wellness modalities (presented in each of the following several chapters) to collectively (1) change the way you think, (2) change the way you breathe, and (3) change the way you move. You can think of these three fundamental goals as the legs of a 3-legged stool. If you’re missing even just one, the stool won’t stand. Yet with all three, it is surprisingly solid, steady, and supportive. Learning to be able to think, breathe, and move with ease and comfort will enable you to then be more resilient and better weather life’s inevitable storms.

The underpinning philosophy?

Less is more, and more is way more!

This statement may at first seem cryptic and contradictory. However, as we proceed, I hope you will see the eloquent simplicity yet transformative power behind it.

Less Is More:

Be gentle. Don’t push. Avoid all or nothing.

This is the most important mindset to embrace as you first embark on a journey to build the three legs of the solid, steady, and supportive stool. In an American culture that embraces a work-hard approach to everything – education, employment, and life – this may at first raise some suspicions. But when it comes to laying a foundation upon which to build better wellness, body, mind, and spirit, it is imperative.

A not small number of people resolve to improve their wellness and, in their initial enthusiasm and determination, end up injured and thus derailed right at the onset. And this outcome is not uniquely American. A study in Victoria, Australia published in the journal *Injury Epidemiology* by Gray and Finch (2015) found that among injuries at fitness facilities, those resulting from overexertion were most common and occurred in both free weight activities and group exercise classes. Free weight activities also posed a risk of crush injuries due to falling weights. In addition to overexertion injuries, group exercise classes also posed a risk of injury from falls and awkward landings.

The relatively recent rise in popularity of forms of fitness, such as CrossFit, that combine high-intensity exercise with multi-joint (functional) movements has added to this problem. Feito and others (2018) published in the *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine* an analysis of 4 years of data on over 3,000 participants. They found that nearly a third of the participants experienced an injury over the previous 12 months. Most common were injuries to joints including, in order from most common to least, the shoulders, back, knees, elbows, and wrists. The authors noted the data revealed beginners in their first year of participation and those who train less than 3 days per week are at greater risk for injuries. Getting injured is a sure way to not stay on track in the quest toward wellness.

“Your current body is the only body that can take you to your new body — so be kind to it.” ~ Elaine Moran

Many people turn to yoga as a means to alleviate tightness, stiffness, and achiness. The increase in yoga participation has exploded in recent years. A joint study by the Yoga Alliance and *Yoga Journal* (2016) found that the number of participants in the United States rose from 20 million in 2012 to over 36 million just four years later. Paralleling that rise in popularity has been a rise in the rate of injuries. A study by Swain and McGwin (2017) published in the *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine* reported that the number of yoga injuries in 2014 were double the number in 2001, with sprains and strains of the trunk being the most common injuries. And the rate of increase in injuries was not the same for all demographics, with injuries among participants 65 and older increasing more than eightfold over the same time period.

Let me make clear that I am by no means recommending against yoga or any type of fitness activity! In fact, just the opposite. But I am emphasizing the need for a different approach. A different approach that begins with a different mindset: *Less is more. Be gentle. Don't push. Avoid all or nothing.* The same is true with non-exercise wellness modalities. In much the same way, when many people decide to change their diet a common approach is to make largescale changes that bring problematic results or are simply unsustainable.

With decades of mixed-messages about diet from experts and seemingly credible sources, some people turn to such crazy options as the werewolf diet (yes, you read that right!) in which you eat according to phases of the moon to the HCG diet in which you restrict your daily intake to only 500 calories and supplement with a pregnancy hormone called human chorionic gonadotropin. Sale of the HCG supplements is illegal. The 5 Bite Diet literally restricts food intake to just 5 bites of food at lunch and 5 bites of food at dinner. True, with such a low caloric intake you will undoubtedly lose weight, but you are likely at best to be hangry (a combination of hungry and angry) for the 3 days you might be able to actually follow this diet. And you could potentially even lose consciousness from low blood sugar. The numbers of people turning to these obviously absurd diets is thankfully fairly low. But much larger numbers of people are following more mainstream diets such as the low-carb keto diet and paleo diet or juice cleanses.

A study by Crosby and others (2021) published in the journal *Frontiers in Nutrition* reported that while a ketogenic diet may be beneficial in management of seizure disorders and some other chronic diseases, the risks generally outweigh the benefits in healthy individuals. Problems can include headaches, fatigue and brain fog as well as nausea, gastrointestinal discomfort. Even very serious consequences may result such as anemia and changes in heartbeat, decreased bone density, and damage to the optic nerve. Studies of the paleolithic diet also raise concerns.

Again, I am by no means recommending against modifying one's diet if there is a need to do so! In fact, just the opposite, especially if it is at the advice of a doctor. But I am again emphasizing the need for a different approach underpinned by the different mindset: *Less is more. Be gentle. Don't push. Avoid all or nothing.* The same is true with wellness modalities beyond exercise and diet. Like they do with fitness and diet, many people decide to begin meditating. This is a terrific idea! But, again, many people begin with goals that are too much, too fast... with the common result that they struggle, get frustrated, and give up. As a meditation teacher, I hear all too often, "I've tried, but I can't meditate." Let me reassure you, yes you can. You have simply taken an unhelpful approach.

**A different approach that begins with a different mindset:
Less is more. Be gentle. Don't push. Avoid all or nothing.**

Let's tease this statement apart and examine the parts individually. **Be gentle.** In many people's mind, yoga is equated (incorrectly, or at least incompletely) with stretching. Oftentimes, people will even use this term. I cringe at even hearing the word stretching and, in fact, strongly discourage my own yoga students from using it. When I hear someone say they stretch, it almost always turns out that they actually over-stretch. What does this mean, and why does it matter? Over-stretching is lengthening a muscle to the point at which the stretch reflex has been triggered. The stretch reflex, or myotatic reflex, is an involuntary contraction of a muscle in response to it being stretched. The nervous system senses danger in the stretch, and contracts in a protective response. Think about that for a moment. Most people elect to

participate in yoga to increase their flexibility or range of motion, yet stretching to the point of triggering the stretch reflex may result in the opposite of the intended goal.

Research into stretching has a long, contentious, and rapidly-evolving history, with numerous contradictory results. Delving into research on stretching may well leave your head spinning. It appears the current “bulk”, not a consensus, of the research literature seems to be landing on the ideas that an approach of low-intensity, long-duration stretching and an approach of high-intensity, short-duration stretching yield little differences in altering range of motion – with both approaches producing small, if any, gains at all (Alfonso and others, 2021). Further, it has been shown that stretching yields mixed and perhaps detrimental results with regard to speed or strength and that stretching is higher in risk and far lower in benefits than has often been touted (Simic and others, 2013). Additionally, it may result in reduced muscular efficiency in maintaining balance (Coratella and others, 2021).

In yoga, I would argue that the stretching is more about the feel-good calming sensations it brings – and that a more gentle approach that avoids triggering the stretch reflex seems to bring more and longer-lasting mental calm that seems to bring with it greater ease of physical movement. This calming effect of stretching on the physical body was shown in a recent study by Ko and others (2020) to positively effect hypertension than the intervention of walking commonly recommended by physicians. And this calming effect relates to flexibility and ease of movement because muscle tightness is chronic muscle contraction, and a contraction stems from signals from the brain. A study published in Journal of Clinical Biomechanics by Konrad and Tilp (2014) suggests that amount of flexibility may actually a consequence of the nervous system in the form of stretch tolerance and stemming from adaptations of nociceptive nerve endings more than the physical architecture of the muscle tissue. The fact that a person who is under anesthesia for a medical procedure can be moved with a range of motion far exceeding their range while conscious supports this contention (Dompier and Denegar, 2001).

I stress to my students that it is beneficial to move slowly, marry the movement with the breath, and a maintain an inward focus in order to develop enough awareness of their internal body sensations that they can sense their “edge”, that being the boundary between safety and comfort versus pain and potential injury. They then will benefit from taking a very gentle approach and hovering on the safe and comfortable side of the edge and slowly breathing. To push beyond that is counterproductive in that it may result in an injury and being sidelined for a substantial time – perhaps substantial enough they might not get back on track. And it is counterproductive in that it actually slows progress by ramping up the nervous system, thereby tightening muscles rather than dialing it down and relaxing muscles. When it comes to stretching – and so much more – gentle is far better.

The “**Don’t push.**” part of the philosophy may be viewed as similar to “Be gentle.” in the context of the stretching example. However, it can also be viewed as a stand-alone concept helpful on its own. Sometimes when people begin a new wellness regiment, they harbor resistance to the new activity that prevents them from building it successfully into a new habit. The old advice would most certainly be to just suck it up, dig in, and use willpower to force yourself to just do it, like it or not. But research into habit-building has shown quite conclusively

that willpower alone is a pretty short-lived and ineffective tool. In our modern world in which we must make numerous decisions through each day, willpower – which is a finite resource – can become depleted. Or at least numerous older studies had reached that conclusion.

More recent work, including that by Inzlicht and others (2014), seems to be challenging that view a bit. Instead, the frequently observed decline in success may be due to either mental distraction on past tasks while beginning new tasks or a sense that work should entitle one to an equal reward. Although the reason(s) remain unclear, what is clear is that willpower does not seem to be effective at getting you to your goals.

Rather than pushing through despite not wanting to, you must find a different way. It may mean making the activity more gentle, smaller, less time-consuming, scheduling it to fit more seamlessly into your existing schedule, or changing to a different activity that is an alternate means by which to move you toward the same goal. Relying on willpower may work for some but, trust me, it is a recipe for failure for most. Don't push. Find a better way.

For some people, a more gentle approach may be just the “don't push” that may help them be more successful in building a consistent habit. For people without a history of movement, the no pain, no gain philosophy is often part of the reason why. It is hardly surprising, really, that if something brings discomfort or even pain, people would not want to repeat it. In fact, it's perhaps more surprising that some people do! Add to that the fact that starting gently is less likely to result in injury, and it makes sense that it would increase odds of success.

For other people, starting with smaller or less time-consuming goals may be just the “don't push” that may help them be more successful in building a consistent habit because it taps into the next part of the philosophy of this book: **Avoid all or nothing**. James Clear, author of the book *Atomic Habits* (2018) contends, “All big things come from small beginnings. The seed of every habit is a single, tiny decision. But as that decision is repeated, a habit sprouts and grows stronger. Roots entrench themselves and branches grow.” He also lays out a wonderfully compelling mathematical argument to support the power of small habits. If each day you got just 1% better at something, then by the end of a year you will be a whopping 37 times better at it than you were at the onset. Thinking back to the early days of my own wellness journey, one of the things I unknowingly did right was at least 10 minutes of exercise on my elliptical almost every day. It seemed so small that, of course, I could do just that much. Yet it added up... eventually serving as the launchpad to completing a marathon.

“A year from now you may wish you had started today.” ~ Karen Lamb

For some people, scheduling the activity to fit more seamlessly into their existing schedule may be just the “don't push” that may help them be more successful in building a consistent habit. I got up at 4:30am for my 5:30am spinning class, but that time may definitely not work for some people. In fact, it would no longer work for me today. Don't fight your biological rhythms and your work and family-life schedule. Rather, get creative about fitting your wellness activities into the existing structure of your life or do modest schedule

modifications to make it work. Not only will it be easier for you and thus more likely to get done, it will also be less disruptive to your family and others around you. That matters because you will benefit from their support and definitely may be hindered by their frustrations if a change affects them in a way they perceive, falsely or accurately, as negatively.

And finally, for some people switching to a different activity may be just the “don’t push” that may help them be more successful in building a consistent habit. If you, like many people, detest the monotony of walking or running on a treadmill, then ditch it. If you don’t, you will find all myriad of reasons to not do it. Find an alternative. If you live where winter involves snowy or icy road and sidewalk surfaces, and you worry about slipping and falling, then don’t plan to rely on outdoor runs in the winter for it will often be “too slick” to get those runs done. There are lots of other possibilities. There are gyms, yoga studios, group fitness classes, group dance classes, walking and biking paths, shopping malls to walk in when it is inclement weather, water aerobics classes, dancing in your living room to your favorite music, and a whole lot more... as well as a ton of inexpensive used fitness equipment or, unfortunately, I could say barely used by huge numbers of people who likely dove in with both feet, full speed ahead, and tried unsuccessfully to rely on willpower to see them through. But that won’t be you because you know a different and better way.

Recall the underpinning philosophy, *“Less is more, and more is way more!”* Hopefully by now the first half of this statement seems less cryptic and contradictory. Let’s now tackle the second half...

More Is Way More:

Frequency trumps duration and intensity. Keep it small and gentle, but do it often.

In our society we have a strong tendency to think in terms of all or nothing. We dive in with both feet and full speed ahead. We’re excited. We’re feeling highly motivated. We’re determined. Let’s do this! We begin by spending an hour and a half at the gym every day for a solid week. We want to get a solid jumpstart on this so we see some gains quickly. Surely that will motivate us to keep going.

By the next week, we’re tired, achy, and the laundry has piled up while we were at the gym. We’re limping our way around the house a bit. Why can’t anyone pick up around the house so we can get around easier? Between work and the gym, we’re worn out. Why can’t anyone else pick up around the house? Bending over to pick up their stuff is the last thing needed while our back is aching from our workout. Why is our back aching anyway? We thought working out was supposed to make us feel better and stronger? Of course we didn’t get to the grocery store, but we did manage to throw together an odd assortment of maybe not-so-healthy things that were in the house – an hour later than usual because we need some time after getting home from work and the gym to decompress. The family is bickering and barking at each other because we’re all hangry, that fun combination of hungry and angry from

low blood sugar. And then we scarf it down too quickly and too much because we're starving. Halfway through week two, we say let's just order pizza tonight.

By week three, we're angry that our spouse seems to always expect us to order the pizza. Can't they do something as simple as order the pizza?? I mean, we went right from work to the gym every night for the past two weeks, well every night the first week but almost every night last week, and we're tired! Halfway through week three, we're coming straight home after work. No gym. We're only human, after all. Geez. How can we be expected to work all day, go to the gym afterward, take care of the house, and food, and laundry, and pay bills? We manage to get to the gym one last time before the end of week three, but its lost its appeal. It's no fun. It feels like we go from working all day to a second job, and one we pay for rather than get paid for. We haven't seen any results. What's the point? And we never go back.

STOP!! There is a better way. A much, much better way: *More is way more: frequent trumps long and intense by far. Keep it small and gentle, but do it often.*

Start small. 45 minutes on your exercise bike? Nope. Smaller. 30 minutes? Smaller. 20 minutes? Smaller. 10 minutes? Yes! Right there. Tiny. It doesn't necessarily have to be 10 minutes. But ask yourself what is a very small amount that is so small you feel you couldn't not do it. Then do it. Nearly every day. Never let more than two days go by without doing it. Never. And you never have to do more than that duration. You can always do more if you feel like it. But you never have to.

Think about it. Imagine you decide to spend 45 minutes on your exercise bike each day, then actually do it four days in week one, three days in week two, two days in week three, and then fizzle out completely and your bike becomes a clothes rack – a not at all unrealistic scenario.

Now imagine instead you decide to spend 10 minutes on your exercise bike each day. It's so short, how can you not fit it in? You actually do it 6 days in week one. It's so short, how can it feel daunting enough to blow it off? You actually do it 6 days in week two. It's so short, you still have time to do the laundry and grocery shop and cook dinner, and you actually do it 6 days in week three. It's so short, you're not worn out and you're not injured, and you actually do it 6 days in week four. In fact, its starting to feel really quite good. You're starting to feel looser and moving with more ease, and you begin to squeeze in an extra 10 minutes at a different time of the day a couple days in week five. You're starting to feel more energized, and you begin to extend some of your rides to 20 minutes – when you have time.

But you seem to often have time now that you have more energy. And the family is used to the new routine and rather enjoying the new energetic, proud you, so they are supportive. And are still doing it a year later and beyond. Maybe ramping it up when it feels easy – physically and in terms of fitting it into your life. Maybe eventually deciding to do a group charity ride or two when it feels easy. Or maybe you dial it back down to your starting tiny amount. But you don't stop. You never let more than two days go by without doing it. Never.

Because it simply feels so wonderful – YOU feel so wonderful by doing it – that you would never give it up.

I suppose you could perhaps argue that of course its easier to fit it in when its an exercise bike in your home instead of a drive to and from a gym. That's a fair argument. But how many of us know several people personally who own a piece of home exercise equipment that does fulltime duty as a clothes rack? Plus, I'd counter that I shifted the choice of workout to what seemed easier to me – and that's precisely what I want you to do. Not necessarily to an exercise bike in your home. But think about what feels like an easier – doable – shift for you, for your preferences, and for your unique situation. That's exactly the point. Then choose a tiny goal... and start!

"Opportunities don't happen. You create them." ~ Chris Grosser

But exercising for such a short amount of time can't be very effective, right? I mean, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommendation is 150 minutes each week of moderate aerobic exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise. Well, look at those numbers. If you do 10 minutes of moderate exercise a day six days a week, you're at 40% of the recommendation rather than zero. And if you begin to ramp it up in intensity over time as you get more fit, then at 10 minutes a day six days a week you're at 80% of the recommendation. Eighty percent or even forty is far better than the zero at which many are presently. And it would only take bumping up your vigorous exercise sessions to 12 minutes and 30 seconds six days a week to reach the recommendation of 75 minutes! A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine by Saint-Maurice and others (2022) reported that if adults 40-85 years old in the United States added 10 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous exercise each day, it could prevent as many as 110,000 deaths per year. With more than 10 minutes, it reduced the number of deaths even more. You've got 10 minutes, and you can do this! Ok. Ten minutes is an effective start and seems less daunting. But how do we build it into a consistent habit?

Research supports the stubbornness of old habits in maintaining poor behaviors as well as the effectiveness of tiny goals in building new habits. A study published by Wood and others (2002) in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology showed that a whopping 40% of our daily actions are the results of habits while distracted thinking about unrelated things rather than conscious choices while being fully focused on the present moment and the decision before us. This is the reason it is so hard to break existing patterns of behavior even if they are undesired or even detrimental.

In later work, Neal and colleagues (2012) showed that changing the context or environmental cues preceding a decision can help to alter old habits and create new habits. In "The Tiny Habits Method" developed by Fogg (2019), this is described as an "anchor moment", an existing routine or event that is used as a cue for the new goal behavior. Example anchor moments might be after one gets out of bed or pours their morning coffee. And then you would immediately follow it by the new goal behavior such as taking a conscious, slow breath to begin

the day with calm and being fully present rather than launching right into the mental list of tasks that lies ahead for the day. And notice I said you would take “a” conscious, slow breath. Just one. Because the initial goal is to build a new habit. You can always do more than that if you feel like it, but it is important to give yourself full, guilt-free permission to only do one. Make it so small as to seem not even worth doing so that it cannot be in any way perceived as daunting or to demanding of your time or energy. Once it becomes a consistent, reliable habit, then you can begin to add more. And in some time you may find it such an integral part of your morning that you are eventually “finding” the time to meditate for 20 minutes every day!

And of course you can take a similar approach with other types of goal behaviors, be they exercise, healthy meal prep, shifting your bedtime, or others. Take a moment to think of one goal behavior you’d like to implement. Make it super, super tiny. And then decide after which anchor moment in your daily life it would make sense to place it after. And then start!

Once you do select and implement a new goal behavior, be sure to celebrate a little whenever you accomplish it. I don’t mean celebrate the one morning squat you did right when you first got out of bed with a Boston crème donut (my favorite, by the way). But celebrate with a brief silent – or even audible – congratulations to yourself. In fact, yes, make it audible. SHOUT it out! YAY, YOU! Because it is in fact worth acknowledging. We often go years wishing to start a new habit... and you just did! On the flip side, do not chastise yourself on a day you do not manage to accomplish your goal. It is likely you’ve already spent a great deal of time and emotional energy berating yourself for your perceived failures. But it is likely not you who failed, but rather your system.

“If you fell down yesterday, stand up today.” ~ H. G. Wells

As James Clear, author of Atomic Habits, describes, most people try to change their behavior by focusing first on the desired outcomes, then the systems they will use to achieve the outcomes, and only far down the road on their identity. Our habits define our identity. However, it is also a two-way street. Our identity can motivate our habits. So rather than an outside-in approach to behavior change, we can benefit from reversing that and instead focusing first on identity then the systems we will use to then achieve the desired outcomes.

The example Clear describes in his book is of a person offered a cigarette who might then decline because they are trying to quit. They are focusing on the desired outcome. Yet, as argued by Clear, they would be more successful if instead they declined because they are not a smoker. Notice in the latter version they have chosen an identity, that of a non-smoking person, and the desired behavioral outcome flows naturally from that. In a different example, in my early days of beginning to exercise, I typically thought to myself that I was an out-of-shape person trying to get moving. Yet the movement became a fully integrated part of my life when instead I thought of myself as an active person and made choices that fit who I was. So decide WHO you want to be, and then BE IT with each choice to perform a tiny habit that reflects that person.

Finally, the most effective part of what worked for me – and has worked for many of my clients and other people who have succeeded in changing their behavior – is enjoy the process rather than focusing on the goal. Notice how the new movement you’re incorporating into your life makes you feel. How it energizes you. How it helps you move with greater ease. How it makes you feel physically strong, and how that makes you feel emotionally strong. Notice how choosing to eat less fast food and more vegetables makes you feel. Perhaps lighter and less bloated. Perhaps more energized. Notice how drinking more water makes you feel. Perhaps having fewer headaches. Or notice how meditating each day makes you feel. Calmer and less reactive. Perhaps more grateful. Perhaps appreciating and enjoying the quirks of personality and behavior of the people around you that used to annoy you. Perhaps noticing more sweet little things around you. I’ll let you in on an embarrassingly sad tidbit: it wasn’t until I was 50 years old that I saw the moon. I mean *really* saw it. Before then I had always been too preoccupied thinking about goals and to do lists. So take the time to pause, reflect, and notice. And with each benefit you notice, celebrate! And remember you’ve already done the most important, and often hardest, part... you started!

Key Take-Aways

- It is not too late to improve your wellness.
- There is a different way that may be more doable for you.
- Less Is More: Be gentle. Don’t push. Avoid all or nothing.
- More Is Way More: Frequent trumps duration and intensity. Keep it small and gentle, but do it often.
- Willpower is finite. Instead, find ways to make your wellness approaches work with your life, not against your life.

Now that we’ve discussed the underpinning philosophy, we’ll move on to discussion of several specific wellness tools and modalities that can help you feel better body and mind and be equipped to better weather life’s inevitable storms. But, before we do, take a moment to reflect on anything in the preceding reading that resonated with you.

Take a first stab at identifying some of your own personal goals. Then select one and try to reframe it as an identity rather than something you will try to do. Think of various ways in which you could work toward that goal, several ways. And then see if you can make them into a very small bite-sized steps that seem so small there’s no way you could not accomplish them. Finally, try to think of a time of day to do it when you could do them before or after an activity you already do.

ACTION ITEMS

STEP 1: Reflect on what your top goal is, and write it down.

For example, to get more exercise, to lose weight, to eat healthier, to feel less bloated, to get more sleep, to be more positive, to be less stressed, to drink more water, etc.

Goal:

STEP 2: Reframe your goal as your identity.

For example, if your goal is to eat healthier, then reframe it from "I am a person who wants to eat healthier," to "I am a healthy-eating person."

Your
New
Identity:

STEP 3: Decide realistic ways you could incorporate your goal activity into your life.

For example, to eat healthier you could buy assorted fresh fruits and vegetables for the week. BUT now make it smaller and thus more likely to be achieved such as just buy 2 bags of pre-cut salad to have a salad with 2 dinners this week to start. AND now tie it to existing triggers such as on Tuesday night and Thursday night when you get home from your daughter's softball practice and the quick salad prep would be not only easy but helpful.

Possible
Action
Goals:

Now
Make
Them
Smaller:

Tie Them
to an
Anchor
Moment:

STEP 4: Decide a realistic way in which you could increase your goal activity the second week. For example, maybe buy 3 bags of salad or maybe again buy 2 bags of salad plus 2 apples to pack with your lunch a couple days.

STOP ACCEPTING FATIGUE, CHRONIC PAIN & FEELING BLUE AS INEVITABLE WITH AGING!

RESILIENCE MIND-BODY PRACTICES™ TO **FEEL BETTER, LIVE BETTER!**

Are you tired of feeling lousy? This easy-to-digest guide is for people in middle age – or who are not yet, but feel like it – who have neglected their health while taking care of everyone else. It will teach you that it is not too late and that surprisingly small, doable, steps can be turned into daily habits to get out of pain and feel better.

Learn how I broke out of the rut of stiffness, pain, and lethargy. Stop the insane workouts and fad diets and instead learn the more sane science-based, heart-centered approach that worked for me and my wellness clients, including proven practices from meditation, yoga, somatic movement, pain reprocessing, gentle fitness, and qigong.

Most importantly, it builds upon this knowledge base to describe real, doable bite-sized changes and actions that can be successfully implemented by real people to retake control of their wellness.

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