



## Activities for Balancing the Body

### Nutrition

While our bodies certainly need fuel to thrive, not all food types affect our bodies and our moods in the same way. When the afternoon snack attack strikes, most people know intuitively that eating fruits or nuts are better choices than a Snickers bar. But fast-paced schedules and operating on “autopilot” sometimes results in quick (and bad!) food choices. Even during the busiest of times, it’s important to choose food mindfully and consciously.

**Whole food:** “Whole food” is food in its natural form: fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, grains, beans, oils, and fish. Whole food does not come in a can, a package, or a box. Whole food supplies the purest form of nutrients to fuel the body and the mind. Great places to find whole foods include: farmer’s markets, natural food stores, community gardens, and local artisan bakeries .



**Diet inventory (self-monitoring):** Many individuals eat mindlessly throughout the day. Examples of mindless eating include sampling ingredients while baking or cooking, snacking on candy from the candy dish, eating a child’s leftovers, etc.

“Self-monitoring” means keeping track throughout the day of the foods you eat. Self-monitoring is a great strategy for losing weight. It’s also a useful exercise to check the nutritional content of food. There are a few ways to monitor food intake, such as recording food in a notebook, a smartphone, on a computer program, or on index cards. Feeling guilty about your eating habits is **not** the goal of self-monitoring; self-monitoring is an exercise to help you become more aware and mindful, which in turn can lead to real changes in food choices.

Tips for good nutrition:



- **Don’t skip breakfast.** Most have heard the cliché, “Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.” This is true! The body needs energy after 8-12 hours without food. Eating in the morning gives your metabolism a needed boost that provides energy and helps burn fuel efficiently all day long. Skipping breakfast can lead to overeating later in the day and can cause headaches and fatigue. Fatigue is often related to poor diet.
- **Drink water.** Water is vital to well-being. Lack of water can make you feel tired, achy, hungry, and grouchy. Aim for eight glasses of water each day. Five of the nine symptoms of depression can be the result of dehydration!



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### Nutrition (cont.)

**Fitness:** A fit body will help your mind to function better. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 provide the following exercise recommendations (Department of Health and Human Services/U.S. Department of Agriculture (DHHS/USDA)): To reduce the risk of chronic disease, engage in at least thirty minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days.

- To obtain greater health benefits, engage in physical activity of more vigorous intensity or of longer duration.
- To help manage body weight gain, engage in approximately sixty minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity activity on most days.
- To sustain weight loss, engage in at least sixty to ninety minutes of daily moderate-intensity physical activity.



**Sports:** Joining a team is a great way to make new friends, stay active, and explore new interests. Neighborhood teams for adults are available for all types of sports including softball, kick ball, volleyball, and Frisbee-golf. Visit a local community recreation center for more information.

In addition to formal exercise such as walking, running, biking, or going to the gym, **informal exercise** can also enhance fitness:

- Cleaning.
- Dancing (alone or with a partner).
- Using the stairs rather than using the elevator.
- Parking farther from a destination.
- Gardening.
- Stretching.

Create a list of enjoyable activities (past, present, and future) and get involved in those activities frequently!

### Take a Break!

Many individuals wear their hard work like a badge of courage on their sleeves. They brag when they work through lunch, stay late at work, forfeit vacations, and take laptops and cell phones on the rare occasion that they do take a vacation. In the long run, this way of behaving will wear the body down and cause sickness and injury. Concentration problems, strained vision, headaches, feeling fidgety—when these problems occur, the body and the mind are saying, “Give me a break!” Unfortunately, these same people will turn to caffeine, junk food, sugar, nicotine, or drugs to keep going.



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### Take a Break! (cont.)

The key to staying productive is to take breaks to prevent negative effects. Babies and small children were programmed to take breaks, usually in the form of naps, after long hours of playing. Workplace schedules of the past had built-in mid-morning and mid-afternoon breaks. The ability to be “in touch” at all times has increased with advanced technologies (e-mail, TiVo, smartphones, bluetooth, and cellular phones). The ability to take work everywhere and never miss a phone call has reduced the amount of time spent away from work tasks and has decreased the amount of time spent relaxing and having fun.



Workday breaks can be as simple as walking to the other end of the office building, standing up and stretching (arms, neck, shoulders), or chatting with a co-worker in the fresh air. Work breaks can be effective with as little as three minutes away from the job every ninety minutes to two hours.

### The Top Five Reasons You Should Take a Break:

1. You give your body a rest from the unnatural postures that develop while sitting at a computer.
2. You develop relationships with your co-workers that can benefit you both personally and professionally.
3. You will be more focused on your work when you return from a break.
4. You will foster creativity.
5. You will feel better at the end of the day and have energy to do the activities that you enjoy.



### Sleep

Because your body needs time to rest each day, sleep is a vital part of being healthy and feeling balanced. Sleeping well can help you cope with stress, solve problems, and get better during an illness or when recovering from an injury. Sleep gives your body a chance to recharge itself. During sleep, the body **restores** tissue, **builds** bone and muscle, and **strengthens** the immune system. Too little sleep can result in drowsiness, irritability, and problems concentrating. A lack of sleep can also cause memory and physical problems. Sleep also helps the brain to function at its peak!



## Activities for Balancing the Body

### Yoga

Yoga has become much more popular over the past ten years. Many different types of yoga exist. Finding a reputable teacher and a type of yoga suited to your personal preferences are the keys to success. Some types of yoga are tied to a particular religious belief; however, most “Westernized” types of yoga focus on physical, mental, and emotional improvements. You do not have to be physically flexible to enjoy yoga or to achieve the benefits of yoga. Yoga provides benefits for men and women. **Yes, even men in the military do yoga!** Yoga can be modified for children and for the elderly. Some individuals find that attending a class to learn basic poses (called **asanas**) is useful, while other individuals find that they can achieve benefits from instructional DVDs or books. In addition to physical movement, most types of yoga include attention to and instruction in breathing and/or mindfulness. Yoga can bring balance to your life by improving your physical health and enhancing your mental focus. Yoga can be practiced in formal classes or in your home or office.



### Volunteering

Volunteering can be an important way to create balance. Donating some of your time and energy to others can give you a great sense of pride and accomplishment. There are many types of volunteer activities. Volunteering can be combined with physical fitness including walkathons, or serving as a youth activity instructor or hiking guide.

Please note that while the **Balancing Your Life** “Just the Facts” sheets offer many ways to better balance your mind and body, we don’t suggest you tackle all the activities offered at once. Rather, take some time to find the activities and suggestions that most appeal to you, and start there. Remember: balance is not a static state, but something that changes over time. It might be said that it’s a path, not a destination. Walking that path is its own reward, forever challenging, yet always fulfilling. Your willingness to pursue a more balanced life will be ongoing, yet rewarding.