

# The Scoop On Fitness

25

*little things*

You Can Do to  
Reach Your Fitness  
Goals

*Sandy Cooper*

This book is dedicated to my blog readers. Thank you  
for showing up to read my stuff.

# Introduction

It's the little things.

All the little things you do in a day contribute to your health, positively or negatively. Think about it. Just today, you've made decisions about waking, worshipping, eating, exercising, recreating, and resting. And you'll do it all again tomorrow. And the next day and the next. Your fitness level—whether optimal or poor—is largely a product of the thousands of small decisions you have been making every day for years.

Small decisions matter. If you change your behavior in small ways every day, you will alter the course of your health, your future, and ultimately, your life.

Whether your goal is to have more energy, drop a few pounds, or just feel more confident in your bathing suit, I'll show you 25 little things you can do to help you get there. No gimmicks. No empty promises. These are tried and true changes you can make gradually over the next 30-60 days that will improve your health.



## Disclaimers

I am not a doctor, a dietician, a nutritionist, or a personal trainer. In fact, I'm not certified in anything. (I think I'm certified in CPR, but I was, like, 15-years-old when I got that, so...)

I am simply a person who has spent the last three decades reading and learning everything I can about fitness and nutrition, and then implementing what I've learned. I do my best every day to live a healthy, well-balanced life. I like helping my friends do it, too.

**Therefore, if you have serious health issues, have significant weight to lose, or if you have any questions about whether anything in this book is right for you, please proceed under the supervision of your healthcare provider.**

Nothing that I offer is dangerous or controversial. But even so, I don't want you to injure or harm yourself, okay?

Also, I am an Independent Beachbody Coach. Some of the links will take you to my Beachbody site. If you purchase something through one of these links, I will receive a small commission. This does not change the cost for you.



Do you feel like fitness is out of your control? Does health and wellness feel overwhelming or out of reach? Do you feel like fit people have a private club where they discuss all the secrets they are keeping from you?

I want to help you.

It doesn't matter where you are in your fitness journey or how many times you've tried and failed. I'm going to show you how you can take control of your health by making small changes, one at a time, and sticking with them.

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# Phase One: Prepare

# #1: Decide

Getting healthy is mostly mental. I realize it involves action and behavior, but the mental component is the most powerful component.

Long before I ever started [P90X](#), or my year-long workout sessions with a personal trainer, my month of [going vegan](#), or my month of [turning into a meat-consuming fool](#), I was mulling it over in my mind.

I was looking over the programs. I was checking out websites. I was paging through books. I was talking to other people about it. I was touring the gym. I was previewing the DVDs.

I was envisioning myself working out, doing those particular exercises. I was looking at my daily schedule and mentally plugging in workout times. I was looking at my calendar to anticipate birthdays, vacations, or special events that might sabotage my new fitness regime. I was looking through the recommended foods of each program and mentally creating meals I could eat and prepare for my family.

By the time I begin any program, I am all in. Quitting is not an option. I have thoroughly explored the new program, and I'm making a deliberate decision to carry it out. I don't make a knee-jerk reaction to a slimy infomercial. It is a well-planned, intentional decision for the sake of my health, and that decision gives me the will-power to see it through.

Don't underestimate the power of your will. I know many of you are thinking your will power is faulty. I've talked to many of you, and you've told me, "*I'm not a very disciplined person. I have no will power.*"

Oh yeah?

It is by the power of your will that you get out of bed to feed that hungry baby for the third time every night, for weeks on end.

It is by the power of your will that you write the term paper or cram for the exam instead of party with your friends.

It is by the power of your will that you forgive your spouse and chose to remain in your marriage through difficult times.

It is by the power of your will that you bite your tongue when you'd rather rant.

It is by the power of your will that you go to work or clean up the dog vomit or mend the relationship or help the hurting friend.

**It is by the power of your will that you do any difficult or unpleasant thing, when *not* doing it is an option.**

You've been using your will power your entire life. And you can use it now.

Your willpower will take you further than you would go on a whim.

It will cause you to resist temptations to give up and give in.

It will carry you through the days you don't see progress.

And before you know it, the decision you make today will morph into healthy habits that last a lifetime.

Seriously. It will.

I promise.

All you need to do today is decide. Decide you are going to read this book every day for the next twenty-five days. Decide that you are going to make some changes and take control of your health. Decide that even if you mess up or lose your way or eat an entire sleeve of Thin Mints®, you will keep moving forward.

You're all in.

## #2: Ditch All-Or-Nothing-Mentality

Nothing will derail your fitness efforts faster than all-or-nothing thinking.

It's the voice that says,

*"I don't have a full hour to work out, so I'm not exercising today."*

Or,

*"I already messed up breakfast, I might as well eat this cake...and French fries...with a giant Pepsi. And order deep-dish meat-lovers pizza for dinner. And sit on the couch and watch The Bachelor. While I also eat this bowl of ice cream with crushed up Reese's Easter Eggs on top."*

This voice says, *"If I can't do it perfectly, then I'm not doing anything."*

I know this voice well. It used to speak to me all day long. I used to wake up each morning with a fresh resolve to be healthy. But if I would eat the bagel with cream cheese or wouldn't exercise at least thirty minutes, I'd feel like I messed up the whole day. So, I'd wait until the next day, where I could wake up with fresh resolve.

I'd do this almost every day.

This voice was especially loud during holidays, parties, vacations, and weekends. It would scream at me, "THERE'S NO USE TRYING TO BE HEALTHY TODAY BECAUSE IT'S SATURDAY!/YOUR BIRTHDAY!/SUPER BOWL SUNDAY!/FAT TUESDAY!/DECEMBER!.

If I couldn't be "healthy" all day/week/month/season, I wouldn't even try.

Then I realized, that voice is a big fat liar. Just because it's Saturday, and I might eat out tonight or I might want pancakes for breakfast, doesn't mean the entire day is a wash.

Just because it's vacation and we'll be eating more and resting more, doesn't mean I need to lay on a beach chair and stuff Pringles in my mouth for seven straight days. Just because it's the holiday season, it doesn't mean I must eat cookies and pumpkin pie daily from November through New Year's Day.

I can do *something* good for my health today. I can eat *some* good meals. I can get *some* exercise.

Just one healthy meal.

Just ten minutes on the elliptical.

Something.

Something is better than nothing. That's what I started saying to this lying voice, and you can say it, too.

Repeat after me:

*"Something is better than nothing."*

### **SOMETHING IS BETTER THAN NOTHING!**

I started saying it every day. Several times a day. This has become my fitness mantra.



You have hundreds of opportunities every single day to choose the healthy option. Missing one or two of those opportunities doesn't need to derail you completely. Doing *a little* of something healthy is better than doing *nothing* healthy.

- You can choose eggs instead of the bagel and cream cheese.
- You can choose to run up the stairs instead of walk.
- You can choose to drink a few sips of water as you swing through the kitchen.
- You can choose to grab an apple and a few nuts as you head out to run errands.
- You can choose to park at the back of the parking lot and walk.
- You can just choose to walk and not drive at all.
- You can pull into Panera Bread instead of Burger King.

- While at Panera Bread, you can order bean soup and chicken Cobb salad with avocado instead of a cinnamon crunch bagel with hazelnut cream cheese (You can do hard things!).
- You can choose to do a 20-minute workout instead of scrolling through Instagram.
- You can choose to bypass dessert.
- You can order green tea, no sugar, instead of a venti vanilla latte with whip cream.
- You can grill the chicken instead of frying it.
- You can choose steamed veggies over a plate of pasta.
- You can choose to drink chamomile tea instead of eat a bowl of cereal (or chips or ice cream) before bedtime.
- You can choose to go to bed and get a good night's sleep instead of watching *The Tonight Show*.

What a tragedy it would be to miss all the little healthy opportunities in a day, simply because you couldn't get past the bagel you ate for breakfast.

So what, if you ate the bagel?

So what, if it was a big ole' giant white flour bagel with full-fat cream cheese, and you ate the entire thing, and you loved every stinking second of it?

Seriously...So what???!!!

You can still choose to run up the stairs instead of walk. And drink a few sips of water as you swing through the kitchen. And grab an apple and nuts on your way out the door....

All-or-nothing will get you nowhere but discouraged, sick, and overweight.

Today, your job is to remember to make the next healthy decision, even when you mess up, and to say out loud, "*Something is better than nothing.*"

## #3 Make a List

Why do you want to be healthy? Or lose weight? Or be more toned?

Have you ever really asked yourself that question? Have you ever honestly, truly, thoroughly answered it?

That's what I want you to do today.

Grab your favorite beverage and your favorite writing utensil. Sit down where it is quiet, preferably near a mirror. Yes, a mirror. Because I really want you to look at yourself. Seriously. Look at your body. Look at your face. Look inside your own eyes and ask the question:

### *Why do I want this?*

And then write down every single reason that comes to your mind, from the deeply profound to the ridiculously shallow. All of them. No editing. Don't try to sound all virtuous-like. If you dig the way your arms look in that tank top, then write that down.

#### **My list looks like this:**

1. My mom had her first heart attack at age 53 (when I was only 13-years old) and died from heart disease at age 70, never seeing three of my four children. She never saw my brother's three children. She never saw my two sisters get married, and she hasn't seen my sister's two sons. She never saw most of her great grandchildren. She always seemed old and unhealthy to me. Not a day goes by that I don't miss her. And I don't want to live like that.
2. I am glorifying God by taking good care of the only body He will give me on this Earth. If I don't take care of it, who will?
3. I want my kids to be healthy. They are watching and learning from everything I do—good and bad. If I don't teach them to make healthy choices, who will?
4. I want to live a full, active life. I want to play and run with my kids and grandkids, for as long as possible.
5. I want to have energy during the day to do everything I need to do.

6. I want to sleep well at night.
7. I want my clothes to fit me well. I hate pulling out a pair of jeans or shorts and not being able to get them buttoned.
8. I like looking at muscle tone on my arms, legs, and abs.
9. I like when people notice that I'm fit and compliment me, or when they ask me what I do for exercise and what I eat.
10. I love the endorphin rush after a hard workout.
11. Exercise helps relieve my stress.
12. Exercise is the best antidepressant.
13. Exercise helps clear my mind. When I exercise, I often pray, plan, create, and sort through issues.
14. Exercise gives me a little break from my kids.
15. Healthy food tastes good to me.
16. I like the way I feel after I eat healthy food.
17. Healthy eating and exercise reduces the risk of every known disease, including all cancers and heart disease.
18. Junk food may taste good for a moment, but I hate the way junk food makes me feel immediately after or the next day. I almost always regret indulging.

So, there you go. That's my list. I've got deep reasons and shallow reasons. And every one of them motivates me, in one way or another.

The thing is, my list won't motivate you. *Your* list will motivate you. In the face of temptation, you'll look back at your list and remember your "Why," and you will gain the energy to move past it.

So, I command you, get your mirror and your pen, get all introspective, and make a list.

## #4: Set A Goal

When I say, “goal,” most people think “weight-loss goal.” Honestly, I am not a big fan of the weight-loss goal. Generally, I think most weight-loss goals set us up for failure. And here’s why:

1. Many people set unrealistic weight-loss goals. Forty-year-olds want to attain their high school weight, their college weight, their pre-baby weight (or Jillian Michael’s weight or Jennifer Aniston’s weight). They have no clue what weight-range is healthy for their body at their current age.

2. Many people try to lose weight too quickly or in drastic ways. No matter how many infomercials and weight-loss ads claim you can lose 30 pounds in one month, that’s not normal or healthy. It’s a double disaster when we set weight-loss goals within a certain timeframe (*I want to lose 10 pounds by the end of the month*). We can’t always control how fast it comes off, and we may resort to severe calorie restriction, nutritional deficits, or starvation to get the weight off by our deadline.

3. Weight doesn’t tell the whole story. Skinny people can be very unhealthy. Weight doesn’t take into account muscle mass and fluid retention. The number on the scale tells us very little about what is going on in our bodies. It’s one tool, but not the be-all-end-all of health.

Don’t get me wrong. There’s nothing wrong with setting a weight-loss goal, as long as you are shooting for a healthy range, and you realize that you may be working at it for a while—*longer than you may think*. Go to a good doctor who knows about nutrition and wellness. Most personal trainers should know what weight range is healthy for you. Nutritionists should know, too. Best to work with all three, if you can. Especially if you really don’t know where to start or what is realistic for you.

What I recommend instead is that you set good health goals that don’t have anything to do with your weight:

1. I will get my body fat percentage down by three percent.
2. I will not eat sugar for 30 days.
3. I will eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every single day this month.

4. I will complete a fitness program from start to finish. (For a list of programs I recommend, [click here](#). I have done all of them and can help you choose the best one for you.)
5. I will exercise at least four times a week until June 1.
6. I will train for and complete the 5K run (or the event of your choice).
7. I will hire a trainer and workout with my trainer every week this month.
8. I will sign up for the spinning class and go to every class this month.
9. I will reduce my [resting heart rate](#) by 10 beats per minute.
10. I will get my high blood pressure or my type-2 diabetes under control and try to get off my meds. (under doctor supervision!)
11. I will drink more water (The right amount of water is 1/2 your current weight in ounces, plus another 8 ounces for every hour of exercise you do and cup of caffeinated beverage you drink. So for a 140 lb. woman who exercises and drinks 2 cups of coffee, that's 94 ounces, a day).
12. I will stop drinking soda.
13. I will stop eating fast food.
14. I will eliminate all processed food from my diet for 30 days.
15. I will walk for 30 minutes, every day for 30 days.

The amazing thing is, if you shoot for one of these goals, the weight-loss will follow! So, pick a goal and write it down. Say it out loud. Put it on a sticky note and put it on your mirror. And then, tell someone about it. Saying it out loud will solidify it in your brain and bring you some accountability. You can even tell me! I'd love to hear about your goal. You can email me at [thescooponbalance@gmail.com](mailto:thescooponbalance@gmail.com) and write, "Hey Sandy, my fitness goal is (blah blah blah)." And I will cheer you on!

## #5: Measure It

Before you begin any fitness plan, it's a great idea to get a good baseline for your current state of unhealthy affairs. You need to know where you want to go (your goal), but you also need to know *where you are*. Just like your GPS, Siri can't give you directions until you plug in your current location.

This will be something you will want to keep and add to, so put it in a journal or on a pad of paper, and keep it in a drawer where ever you will do your measurements (bathroom?).

I've been keeping a log of various measurements for about ten years. Mine is just a bunch of pieces of loose-leaf paper stapled together, with little comments scribbled on it like "Ugghh!" and "Yay!!!" and "What the...???", and "Finally!!!"

Kind of crude. Nothing fancy.

It may seem like an insignificant step (little things often do), but you will thank me for this one later:

- When you are about three weeks into your new healthy eating and diet plan and you fail to see any "progress" with your naked eye.
- When you step on the scale around week five and you see that you've gained weight instead of lost it.
- When you are standing at the buffet table, staring at the unlimited desserts, and you are wondering if cutting out sugar is really worth all the effort.

Trust me, you will be so glad you have criteria with which to compare yourself, including, but not limited to, a number on a scale during those difficult times.

It's helpful in seeing present progress, but also in setting future fitness goals. I often look back and see what I weighed and measured before and after various programs or significant events of my life, and it helps me determine what is realistic and what to do next.

For example, though weight charts say I could weight as little as 115 lbs. for my height, in the last twenty-five years, I've only weighed 115 lbs. *immediately after the death of my son.*

In fact, I've only been in the 120s after extended fasts (as in, barely eating!) or being very sick (vomiting!), despite the fact that I've eaten well and exercised regularly for 30 years.

That tells me, setting a weight goal in the low end of my “safe” range is not “safe” for me, no matter what the weight charts say or how badly I would like to weigh that. (I don't want to weigh that, by the way. I look gross at that weight).

But other times, I can look back and see some things that worked really well. For example, P90X2 brought the most dramatic results I've ever had in a program. I followed it diligently, including the eating plan. It was difficult, but I was probably the strongest and healthiest I've ever been. I also lost over 10 lbs., 9 inches and 3% body fat, in 90 days.

You can read about [my progress with P90X2 here](#), and you can [shop for P90X2 here](#).

Other programs or tweaks in my diet were just as difficult, but had the opposite effect. It's nice to be able to look at some solid numbers to compare what's working and what's not, so I set appropriate goals.

Here are some ways I recommend you measure as you begin your journey to health.

**Weight:** Do this on a regular scale, naked, first thing in the morning after you pee, and before you drink anything. Do it this way every time. Notice daily fluctuations. They are normal, depending upon what you ate the day before and the time of the month (ladies).

(And also, “Daily Fluctuations” would be a great title for a garage band.)

**Body Fat Percentage:** There are many ways to measure body fat. Usually, you need to have this done at a gym or in a doctor's office. Some methods are more accurate than others. But it's a really good number to know, especially if you have weight to lose. I have a scale that measures it. This is not the most accurate way, but it gives me a ballpark, and that's all I really want.

**Measurements:** This should be done at the same time of day as your morning weigh-in. Use a tape measure and simply measure around your chest, your waist (right over your belly button), your hips, your butt, and around each thigh. If you have help, you can also measure biceps and shoulders, even your calf muscles! It doesn't really matter, except that you

measure the exact same areas at the same time of day, each time you measure.

**BMI:** This stands for Body Mass Index. I talk a lot about [BMI, and how to measure it here.](#)

**“Before” Photo:** Honestly, the only time I’ve ever take a “before” photo was for P90X2. Call me crazy, but whenever a situation involves someone else photographing me looking “yuk” in a bathing suit or jog bra, I respectfully decline. However, I always regret not having one, once I start to see progress.

And don’t you just LOVE looking at a good “before” and “after” photo? I do. So please take one, so I can look at yours.

**Resting Heart Rate:** This is a great measurement to take, because it measures your fitness level (something a scale will NEVER tell you). [I talk about how to measure that, here.](#)

**Clothing:** Similar to using a tape measure, selecting a pair of pants and a shirt as your base items will help you track your progress.

**Clinical Measurements:** If your goal is to lower your blood pressure or improve some other diet-related condition (like type-2 diabetes), then documenting your numbers before you start is critical.

You will want to re-measure these areas periodically. Usually once a month is sufficient. I do weigh myself daily, but only write it down monthly; and even that, only when I’m working a specific program. Just make sure you write everything down in one place where you can refer back to it often.

So, your job today is to get a baseline for everything you can. Write it all down and tuck it away in a safe place. Then take a “Before” pic and set it aside for me. Thank you.

## #6: Pick a Plan

Planning is an absolutely critical aspect of your health. And by “plan,” I’m referring to an over-all plan to reach your goal. (You should also plan your meals and your daily exercise times. But we will discuss those in later chapters.)

### So, what plan should you chose?

It doesn’t matter, really. As long as it meets the following criteria:

**1. It should be goal-specific.** This is why it’s so important to set a goal. You can’t really choose a good plan if you don’t know what you want to accomplish. If your goal is to lose weight, then choose a fat burning diet and exercise program with lots of cardio. If your goal is to eat more fruits and veggies, then find a plan with interesting recipes and integrate those into your meals. If your goal is to run a marathon, then you need a good running schedule. If your plan is over-all health, then you should look for a well-rounded exercise and clean-eating plan.

**2. It should be something that is do-able and likeable *to you*.** If a gym membership isn’t in your budget, look for a good home-based workout program. If your schedule doesn’t allow for at least eight hours of intense training per week and you can’t swim, don’t sign up for the triathlon. If you hate running, you probably shouldn’t sign up for the mini-marathon. If you need accountability, then don’t plan on working out alone in your basement.

**3. It should last at least 30 days.** Thirty days is about the length of time you’ll need to get a good feel for whether the plan is effective. Thirty days also gives you ample time for the plan to become a habit, *or not*. You might decide you hate the plan and need to go to Plan B. And that is totally okay. I’ve ditched a lot of failed programs over the years. There’s no shame in that. Everyone is different. What works for me won’t necessarily work for you. But it’s a good idea to stick with one thing for a few weeks to give it a fair trial before going to Plan B.



Today, you are sealing the deal. You are joining that gym, hiring that trainer, downloading the training schedule, or [purchasing the workout DVDs](#). You know where you are, where you are going, and why you want to

go there. You've decided you are moving forward, and you are in your vehicle, ready to go. All the pieces are in place. I'm so proud of you.

# Phase Two: Eat

## #7: Cut it Out

For most of my life, I was under the impression I could pretty much eat whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, and I'd still be fit and healthy. I was all, "*I can eat four pieces of deep-dish pizza and breadsticks with a pint of ice cream for dessert and wash it all down with a giant Gatorade. I'll just do an extra 30 minutes on the elliptical tomorrow.*"

Because I've always enjoyed working out, I reasoned I would simply exercise extra super-duper hard the next day. And I did. You know, calories in/calories out.

And for a while, that worked for me.

Right up until the day it stopped working. (I miss you, 25-year-old metabolism!)

Turns out, there's more—a LOT more—to metabolizing food than calories in/calories out.

No one tells you this, but there is a magical little metabolism switch—probably nestled behind the uterus somewhere—that flips automatically when a woman blows out the candles on her Crisco-frosted 40th birthday cake. She cannot do anything to stop it, except have wonderful skinny genes.

(Not to be confused with skinny *jeans*.)

(Though, they are closely related.)

If you are a skinny-gene/jean girl, you are dismissed from reading the rest of this ~~chapter~~ book. At the age of 65, you, my genetically-thin friend, will still be blissfully polishing off the edges of every brownie pan; all the while, successfully rocking your mini-skirt and your two-piece bathing suit. Enjoy those brownie edges, Girlfriend, because you will have no friends—we will all hate you. I am not bitter.

KIDDING. We won't hate you. And there's no switch. Not a visible one, anyway. But we do now know metabolism is affected by many things, including age.

**It's also affected by the kinds of foods you eat.**

You can't do anything about aging. But you can control what you put into your mouth.

Therefore, for the next couple chapters, we're going to be talking all about food—what to cut out and what to add to your diet for maximum health.

**After the mental component, paying close attention to what we put in our mouths is the single-most important aspect of staying healthy.** If we want to remain fit and healthy into mid-life and beyond, we have to cut some things out of our diets. Probably for-like-ever.

Don't worry. You can ease into this a little at a time. It's a process. Just keep moving forward, that's the important thing.



I don't want to insult your intelligence with this next list, but just in case any of you haven't heard, here are the things you should eliminate from your diet, completely:

**Hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils:** Mostly, these are found in processed baked-goods and fried foods, but they are also hidden in many other processed foods. (Also in Crisco-frosting, by the way.) Read your labels. I just saw it on the package of barbeque-flavored sunflower seeds my daughter was eating! In 2015, the FDA banned these oils from all foods. Companies have until June 18, 2018 to comply. Until then, it's up to you to avoid it.

**Artificial sweeteners:** Aspartame (Equal), Sucralose (Splenda), Saccharine (Sweet n Low). If a "sweet" product says "sugar-free" on the package, it has one of these. This is especially present in "diet foods." I just saw it last night on a jar of protein powder from the "Natural" section of our supermarket. It's in sugar-free gum. It's in Crystal-Light and Vitamin Water. It's in diet soda. It's poison. Don't eat it. Or drink it.

**High-Fructose Corn Syrup:** A man-made sweetener with zero nutritional value. It is in most processed foods, even ones that are only mildly sweet or not sweet at all. Weird. You know the drill. It's poison. Don't eat it.

**All sodas, diet or otherwise:** Speaking of zero-nutritional value, there is nothing redeemable in soda. Absolutely nothing. It doesn't even effectively hydrate you. I know a whole lot of you drink soda (I'm looking at my husband right now), and I know it's addictive. I used to drink it, too. I

understand your plight. However, it harms your health no matter how you look at it. If you drink diet soda, you are filling your body with toxins from the artificial sweeteners. If you drink regular soda, you are drinking a ridiculous amount of sugar. And then there's the artificial colors and flavors...It's all poison. Don't drink it.



Notice, if you eat a **diet of whole foods**, none of the preceding foods are an issue. Not-a-one.

What are whole foods? I'm so glad you asked.

## #8: Eat Whole Foods

The general public is very confused about what is “processed food” and what is “whole food.” For a long time, I was confused, too. Most likely, it’s because of slick marketing on the part of the processed food people, trying to convince us that their laboratory concoctions are actually healthy.

*“Made from REAL fruit”*

*“All natural”*

*“Made from WHOLE GRAINS”*

*“Heart Healthy!”*

What does all of that mean? Not a whole lot, except that the food is highly processed. If a food has to convince you that it’s good for you, it probably isn’t.

Your goal should be to eventually eliminate all processed food from your diet and eat only whole foods.

### **What is a Whole Food?**

- If the food came from the ground (plant) or has a mother (animal), it’s a whole food.
- A whole food has had nothing added to it or taken from it. It is in its simplest form, the way God created it to be.
- In a grocery store, you find most whole foods on the perimeter of the store.
- When you look at the ingredients, there should be only one. Or there is no ingredients list at all.
- When you look at the food, it should look like the food in question.
- The more ingredients you see, generally, the more processing has taken place
- If the ingredients list contains any chemicals, preservatives, artificial coloring or flavoring, it is absolutely not a whole food.

- Many whole foods have limited or no packaging (think produce and meat).
- Most whole foods can be purchased from a farmer's market.

*“Real food doesn't have ingredients,  
real food is ingredients.”  
~Jamie Oliver~*

From there, it starts to get a little complicated.

For one, not all processing is unhealthy. For example, butter, plain Greek yogurt and cheese are processed (minimally), but they are all foods that you could safely work into a healthy diet. (Unless it's spray cheese in a can. That's neither cheese nor healthy. That's just gross.)

Also, you can't always look at the number of ingredients. Salsa may contain 10 or more ingredients, but if it's a fresh salsa, it should contain only a variety of chopped up vegetables and herbs. All healthy, whole foods, just chopped up and mixed together. The same is true for a bag of frozen, mixed vegetables.

You can also find many whole foods (fruits, veggies, meat, and fish) in the frozen food section—right next to the Eggo Waffles and Pizza Pockets.

And then there are *degrees of processing*. This is where it gets muddy for most people, even me.

To help clarify, I've compiled a little list of foods at various stages of processing.

### **Examples of Whole Foods vs. Processed Foods**

Apple=whole food  
 Apple Sauce=minimally processed food  
 Apple Pop Tart=highly processed food

Blueberry=whole food  
 Blueberry Jam=minimally processed food  
 Blueberry Flavored Gummy Treats=highly processed food

Brown Rice: whole food  
 White Rice: minimally processed food

Rice Crispy Treat: highly processed food

Corn: whole food

Organic Corn Tortilla: minimally processed food

Sugar Corn Pops: highly processed food

Oats: whole food

Kind Bars: minimally processed food

Little Debbie Oatmeal Cream Pie: highly processed food

No matter what your fitness goal, a diet rich in whole foods is an absolute necessity. Buy organic, when you can, and drink plenty of clean, pure water. **This should be your highest fitness priority.**

Unless, of course, your fitness goal is to be overweight and sick. Then, Little Debbie Oatmeal Cream Pies should be your highest priority.

## #9: Eliminate or Greatly Reduce

So far, I've told you to eliminate hydrogenated oils, artificial sweeteners, high-fructose corn syrup, and soda. There is no controversy surrounding the effect these foods have on our health. (Unless, of course, you are the people who actually make those foods. Or you are personally addicted to those foods.)

The following list is a little more hairy. Depending on which nutrition expert you are currently reading, you will be told varying information. Some will tell you to eliminate the following from your diet completely. Some will tell you that moderation is fine. And yet others will tell you that they are healthy.

I will explain the controversy, offer my quick little opinion after each one, and tell you what I do. Do with it what you will.

**Sugar:** Two-hundred years ago, the average American consumed about 10 pounds of sugar per year. Today, the average American consumes about 170 pounds of sugar per year! That's the equivalent of  $\frac{1}{4}$  of our total calorie intake or one full bowl of sugar, every fourth meal.

The research is coming out in droves: Sugar consumption has been linked to insulin resistance, high cholesterol, heart disease, obesity, liver disease, and metabolic syndrome. Sugar is also what cancer uses as fuel in your body. Not to mention, it's highly addictive.

No doubt: Sugar is the new Food to Hate.

I vacillated about whether to put sugar in this chapter or in the "Cut it Out" chapter. Almost every day, a new study reveals the damaging effects of sugar, so it's difficult to defend sugar consumption as part of a healthy diet. I kept it here, because there are some naturally occurring sugars (in fruit, for example) that are not harmful.

What I do: I have drastically reduced the amount of sugar in my diet, but I have not completely eliminated it. I do enjoy having a dessert now and again (maybe once a week). I also use raw honey and pure maple syrup—both natural sugars—sparingly. I eat fresh fruit every day, without regard to sugar grams. I feel much better physically when I do not eat refined, white sugar.

**Dairy:** Most natural health advocates agree: Conventional dairy products are of little value to our bodies. The pasteurizing process heats the milk

up to high enough temperatures to destroy, not only all the harmful bacteria, but also, all the beneficial organisms and enzymes in milk. It alters vital amino acids, reducing our bodies' ability to access the protein, fats, vitamins and minerals. Then, milk producers add powdered milk and synthetic vitamin D to "low fat" milk to make it thicker. Finally, they "homogenize" the mixture so fat particles remain in suspension—making them indigestible in the intestine. In case you wondered, conventional milk is not a whole food. It is very highly processed.

Many natural health advocates (except for vegans and the Paleo people) will recommend raw or fermented dairy products (like kefir and whole-milk yogurt), preferably from local farms, where the cows are grass-fed and not injected with hormones and antibiotics. Goat's milk is also considered to be very healthy.

What I do: I'm personally torn on dairy. I mostly purchase and consume organic dairy, including cheese, Greek yogurt and half and half. The more I read, the more I eliminate. I think raw dairy is a great option, but I have a mental issue with the whole "raw" thing. And goat's milk? Same thing. Can't quite get myself to try it. Is that just me?

**Soy:** Soy is big business. From 1992 to 2006, soy food sales increased from \$300 million to \$4 billion (with a "B"), due to a massively wild and successful campaign by the soy industry to promote soy as a health food. From the years 2001 to 2007, 2,700 new soy-based products were introduced to the food supply. Not surprisingly, 85% of consumers perceive soy products as healthful.

However, 91% of the soy grown and used in the world is genetically modified soy (GMO). The genetic modification is done to impart resistance to the toxic herbicide Roundup. While this is meant to increase farming efficiency and provide you with less expensive soy, the downside is that **your soy is loaded with this toxic pesticide**. The plants also contain genes from bacteria that produce a protein that has never been part of the human food supply. Nice.

Also, 80% of the soy grown in the world is used as feed for animals in conventional farms. That means all those toxic pesticides are now in the meat and eggs. (Yet, another good reason to choose organic.)

Still think soy is healthy? Soy consumption has been linked to the following health problems:

- Breast cancer
- Brain damage

- Infant abnormalities
- Thyroid disorders
- Kidney stones
- Immune system impairment
- Severe, potentially fatal food allergies
- Impaired fertility

Fermented soy products, such as natto, tempeh, and soy sauce are not the bad guys. Asians have been consuming these products for centuries with no ill health effects.

**Unfermented soy is the type of soy used in most American foods. And this is the one you should avoid.**

What I do: I try to avoid soy, though it is impossible if I eat any processed foods (It's in almost *everything*), or if I eat Asian food (edamame, mostly). If I have a choice, I look for non-GMO on the label.

**Wheat:** Gluten-free diets are very popular right now. Some people have a genuine adverse reaction to wheat gluten and should eliminate it, but other people think wheat is bad for them and choose to avoid it. There are books and programs written specifically about this food. The anti-wheat people are very passionate about eliminating wheat. If you cross one of the anti-wheat people, you will know it.

What I do: Like sugar, Americans eat way too much wheat, usually in the form of refined, enriched wheat flour. However, when in doubt, I do tend to go back to what God told people to eat in the Bible. I really do. And people ate wheat in the Bible. It was usually in the form of sprouted grains. So mostly, if I do eat wheat bread, it's sprouted grain bread. I use mostly whole wheat pasta and whole wheat flour for cooking. My kids eat a lot of pasta and bread, which is terrible, I know. I blame myself. I'm working to change this.

**Enriched flour:** You know all of this already, but enriched flour is highly processed, stripped of all its nutrients and fiber, and then "enriched" with synthetic vitamins. It's pretty much a zero-nutrient food.

What I do: Sometimes in a restaurant, I will order a sandwich made with enriched flour bread. I may use enriched flour for baking, if whole grain flour ruins the texture, like in a birthday cake. I sometimes buy or make bread with enriched flour. Otherwise, I try to avoid it.

**White rice:** Like enriched flour, white rice is stripped of all nutrients and fiber. You already know all of this, too. You are so smart. You could have written this book.

What I do: We eat brown rice at home, but sometimes we will order white rice at a restaurant, if brown rice is not available. I actually prefer the taste of brown rice.

**White potatoes:** Many people lump white potatoes in with other “white” foods, like breads, rice, and pastas. This started mainly with the “low carb” diets, because of their high carbohydrate/low protein content.

Potato advocates will argue that potatoes are good for you. A large potato with skin has about 278 calories, seven grams of fiber, and seven grams of protein. It’s low in cholesterol and sodium and is also a good source of vitamin C, vitamin B6, potassium, and manganese.

Plus, God made it: it’s a whole food.

What I do: I’m a fan of the potato; baked, mashed, boiled, and roasted. I serve them at home every week. I try to avoid French fries and chips, because they are deep fried in canola, soybean, or vegetable oils, have too much salt, and I will eat all of them. Like, the whole bag/basket. It’s not pretty.

**Pork:** Low Carb/High Protein people will tell you to eat pork like you would chicken or beef—it’s “the other white meat.” On the opposite end of the spectrum, you will hear that pork is “unclean.” Pigs tend to eat anything, including their own young. They also have a limited excretory system, which means they retain a lot of toxins in their fat and meat.

What I do: I do eat bacon. Because: *mmmmmm*. Other than that, I avoid pork.

**Shellfish:** Scientists gauge the contaminant levels of our oceans, bays, rivers, and lakes by measuring the mercury and biological toxin levels in the flesh of crabs, clams, oysters, and lobsters. Why? Because shellfish are the scavengers of the sea. They eat the excrement and waste of all other living creatures.

Shellfish advocates argue that shellfish is low in calories, high in protein, and a good source of vitamin B12, copper, and zinc.

What I do: I do not eat shellfish. I cannot get past the “excrement” thing.

**Canola Oil, Soybean Oil, Corn Oil, and Vegetable Oils:** One of the biggest problems with highly processed and refined vegetable oils is that the polyunsaturated component of the oil is highly unstable under heat, light, and pressure, and this heavily oxidizes the polyunsaturates which increases free radicals in your body.

The end result of all of this refining and processing are oils that are highly inflammatory in your body when you ingest them, potentially contributing to heart disease, weight gain, and other degenerative diseases.

Advocates of these plant-based oils will tell you the health warnings are a “myth”, and they are actually beneficial to your heart. The FDA allows the canola oil to use this qualified health claim: *“Limited and not conclusive scientific evidence suggests that eating about 1.5 tablespoons (19 grams) of canola oil daily may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease due to the unsaturated fat content in canola oil. To achieve this possible benefit, canola oil is to replace a similar amount of saturated fat and not increase the total number of calories you eat in a day.”*

What I do: I use only olive oil, organic butter, and coconut oil.

**Coffee/Caffeine:** Caffeine increases stress hormones, is highly acidic, affects urinary output, and is addictive. When we rely on coffee to wake us up and/or get us over the mid-day hump, we lose the ability to recognize our body’s natural signals indicating a need for rest, exercise, or nutrition.

On the flip side, coffee has been linked to a decrease in dementia, type-2 diabetes, and certain cancers. It is also rich with antioxidants. Caffeine is known to boost mental clarity and performance.

What I Do: Well, right now, I’m on my second cup of coffee, if that tells you anything. But honestly, I’ve stopped drinking coffee numerous times over the years; during pregnancy and fasting, mostly. Just reading through a few articles about the ill-effects for the purpose of writing this chapter makes me reconsider drinking it, even now...as I take another sip. I love coffee. But I don’t know if the pros outweigh the cons.

I’m on the fence here.

**Alcohol:** It is a common perception that alcohol, red wine in particular, is beneficial to the heart. However, even that is controversial. Most experts agree that, if you do drink, you should not have more than one or two drinks per day. Obviously, alcohol consumption carries numerous risks, including impairment and dependency.

What I do: I didn't touch alcohol throughout my 20s and 30s. In my 40s, I now drink an occasional glass of wine. I do not like the taste of beer or liquor, so I do not drink those.



I would recommend you play around with this list. Eliminate a food for a few weeks, and see how you feel. Add it back in and see how you feel again. This is a great gauge for how it's affecting you physically. If you want an even more in-depth way to measure the effects of certain foods, read on.

# #10 Know Your Nutritional Type

A few years ago, in an attempt to lose some (any!) of the 18 pounds I had gained on Lexapro, [I went on a plant-based diet \(vegan\) for a month](#). I completely cut out all animal products, including eggs, dairy, bone broth, and meat.

I had read numerous success stories about veganism (increased health, increased energy, and decreased body fat). Because of some on-going health issues, my brother and his wife were experimenting with raw-veganism, and the weight was falling off their bodies, their skin looked amazing, and they felt great. There is a lot of science and anecdotal evidence supporting veganism, so I gave it a try.

After 30 days, I lost about one pound.

(That's one, as in 1.)

## one

wən/

*number*

cardinal number: **one**

1. the lowest cardinal number; half of two; 1. "Sandy lost one pound while she was a vegan."

Honestly, I could go use the restroom right now and lose one pound.

I felt strong, but not any better than I did before veganism. Besides, veganism was difficult, especially when eating at restaurants or at other people's homes. I truly missed eating chicken, chicken broth, cheese, and eggs. Seriously, I had no idea how much I loved eggs until I stopped eating them. And also, smoked gouda. If one single food stands between me and veganism, it's smoked gouda.

Veganism: Fail

A few months later, in an attempt to lose those same 18 pounds (stubborn, those pounds), I went on a Paleo diet. If veganism has a nemesis, it's Paleo.

Again, the Paleo people have lots of science and success stories to back up their claims. I have many good friends who have been Paleo for years, and

they have not only experienced fat loss, but also have marked improvement in overall health.

I completely cut out sugar, dairy, and all grains, but increased organic meat and eggs. I ate more meat than I had ever eaten in my life, along with nuts, fruits, and vegetables.

After a few days, I noticed I was significantly weaker. Even though I had recently completed P90X, I could barely lift the weights I was lifting before I had started the Paleo diet. After workouts, I felt fatigued and shaky.

I decided to add back a serving of plain oatmeal immediately after my workouts, and I instantly felt better. But by the end of my month-long Paleo trial, I was done with meat. *I was gagging at the thought of meat.* I have never been a big meat lover, so this Paleo life was too much for me.

The up-side: I lost three more pounds!

Paleo-ism: Semi-Fail

I've never been more convinced than I am today that no diet is a one-size-fits-all. And, why should it be? God created our bodies so differently—both genetically and environmentally—how can we all eat the exact same things for maximum health? I truly believe that some people will thrive on veganism—there are [elite athletes, breaking world records who are vegans](#). And for every vegan-athlete, there is also a Paleo-athlete. (CrossFit Games, anyone?)

That is the whole idea behind [Nutritional Typing](#)—designing a diet based solely on how *your* body reacts to it. I took [this test](#) a few years ago and found it to be very helpful in determining what is best for my body

(Turns out, for me, my optimal diet is neither veganism nor Paleo-ism, but a combo of the two.)

(I could have saved myself two months of diet torture had I simply adapted my diet to the results of my [Nutritional Typing test](#).)

If you really want to know what is best for your body, [take this test](#). Then try to apply what you've learned. It is free, but it requires you to register. It will take you about 15 minutes to register and answer all the questions. Have fun!

# #11 Create a Simple Meal Plan

If I could give credit to one practice that contributes most to my clean-eating success, it's meal planning. I'm not kidding. I could have the best intentions and the best ingredients, but if I don't plan the meals ahead of time, I end up eating a box of graham crackers, with peanut butter straight from the jar.

Every single time I fail to plan meals for the week, I regret it. Without exception.

Take last week, for instance. I thought, *"I've been to Costco. I've got frozen meat and frozen veggies and fifteen cans of black beans, as well as giant vats of chicken and vegetable broth. Not to mention, a family-sized bag of Pirate Booty. And fifty flour tortillas. We don't need a meal plan this week. We can wing it. We'll just go with the flow. You know, easy-breezy. We have tons of food. It will be fine."*

Except it totally wasn't fine. There is nothing easy-breezy about standing at the freezer at 4 pm staring down a whole (frozen) chicken and giant bag of mixed (frozen) vegetables, wondering how I am going to cook it in the next two hours, while also reviewing vocab words with my third-grader, and checking math homework for my eighth grader, and driving my 16-year-old to her babysitting job.

On Sunday evening, it feels inconvenient and unnecessary to sit down with a pen and paper and think through every dinner for the upcoming week. On Monday morning, the last thing I want to do after carpool is swing by Kroger in the freezing cold to stock my fridge with the ingredients I'll need to actually make those dinners.

**But I've learned that life is just better when I know ahead of time what I'm making for dinner. It's like magic.**

Now when I say "meal planning", I'm not talking about sitting down with a giant cook book and a calendar and filling in 21 gourmet breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, plus snacks, for the entire week. Personally that kind of detail throws me over the edge of sanity (not to be confused with the edge of glory—Lady Gaga).

I suggest simply jotting down a simple meal plan for dinners, only—that's all I do. (I'll talk about breakfasts and lunches in a minute). I promise, it saves you all kinds of time (thought time, shopping time, and prep time). This isn't a complicated process. It takes me maybe 5 to 10 minutes to

plan my meals for the entire week, and another 5 minutes to make my grocery list from this meal plan.

### **How I Create My Meal Plans in Five Minutes**

Basically, I cook dinner at home about four nights a week, depending on what is happening in our lives.

One of those four home-cooked meals usually involves chicken.

One meals involves pasta or rice (easy with fresh salad and bread!)

And one involves soup (a great way to sneak veggies into your diet).

One night involves fish, beef, or maybe Mexican.

One night, we do pizza (delivery or homemade).

One night, we eat out (usually Saturday.)

One night, we eat left-overs.

I make very simple side-dishes. The easiest and healthiest thing you can do for your family is make a habit of serving fresh produce with every single meal and snack. Typical side dishes for us include fresh tossed salad with homemade vinaigrette, fresh fruit salad, a plate of freshly cut fruit and veggies (whatever I have on hand), and fruit smoothies.

Every once in a while, I may steam some broccoli or asparagus. Lately, I've been roasting whatever vegetables I have on hand. Sometimes I get really crazy and add some potatoes (baked, mashed, or sweet). But I always make it a point to have fresh produce in my fridge. Whenever I serve a meal, some sort of fruit or veggie goes with it, always. If I'm out of produce, it's time to go to the store.

If time is an issue for you, I suggest you cook enough meat for two or three days at a time. We don't eat meat daily, but when we do, we do for at least two days in a row. For example, on Sunday, I grilled a double batch of barbeque chicken so I could also use it for chicken-veggie wraps on Monday. When I roast whole chicken, I always roast two: one to eat the night of the roasting and the other to use the next night in a stir-fry or a chicken salad. Then, I use the bones to make homemade soup stock for the third night (I double-portion this, too, and freeze half for next time—stretching the chicken to four total meals).

At least once a week, I use a crock-pot. The crock-pot is a most wondrous invention. You can throw endless combinations of meats and veggies into a crock-pot in the morning, completely ignore it for eight hours, and it almost always comes out perfectly.

(For a year of ideas for these endless combinations, check out my friend Stephanie's [crock pot blog](#). Stephanie has also written my favorite crock-pot cookbook, which I have been using weekly since I bought it. You can buy it here: [Five Ingredients or Less Slow Cooker Cookbook](#). As the name implies, all the recipes are five ingredients or less. And as the name does NOT imply, they are also all gluten-free! )

### **What about Breakfast and Lunch?**

I refuse to stress about breakfasts—like, *at all*. Instead I rotate through a few faithful options depending on my mood and my schedule. I've been in an eggs mood for almost a year, so I feel a little deceptive telling you I'm rotating. You guys, scrambled eggs with a half of an avocado and salsa is about my favorite thing in the world, currently. But if I were to get tired of eggs, and I were to rotate, I would have on hand the following breakfast foods:

- Fresh fruit
- Sprouted grain (Ezekiel) bread or homemade bread for toast
- Oatmeal
- Peanut butter and almond butter
- Raw local honey
- Plain Greek yogurt
- All-natural bacon
- Organic chicken sausage
- Homemade pancakes, which Jon makes on the weekends, and we warm up during the week. (He's a keeper.)

Every day for lunch, I have the same thing: a smoothie. I use [Shakeology](#) protein powder, add water and ice, a banana, maybe some frozen berries, and tons of spinach or kale. I've been doing this daily for at least three years.

The idea here is to streamline your breakfasts and lunches. You don't need to eat the same thing I eat, but find something super healthy, loaded with fruits, veggies, and healthy proteins. Make sure it's something you love. Eat it every day, until you get sick of it.

Eating healthy does not have to overwhelm you or throw you over any edges—sanity, glory, or otherwise. With a little bit of planning, you can

stock your fridge with delicious, healthy foods and whip them into simply nutritious meals in no time.

## #12 Keep a Simple Food Log

I tend to underestimate what I'm eating and overestimate how much I exercise. And then I wonder why I'm not losing weight. (I'm sure I'm the only one who does this.) The best way to keep me honest is to write everything down.

If you have a fitness or weight-related goal in mind, the first thing a good personal trainer or nutritionist will tell you is to keep a food log—as in, write down every single thing that you eat and drink, down to the very last nibble, lick, and sip.

I promise you, no matter how many times you've done this, you will be shocked, either at the sheer quantity of food you are consuming, or at the incredibly cruddy food choices you are making.

A food journal is very beneficial for pinpointing the times of day where you tend to be most tempted to eat too much or eat poorly, as well as giving you a ballpark figure of the number of calories or how much sugar you eat in a typical day.

For me, every time I keep a food log, it also helps me stop popping little bites of this and that in my mouth, simply because I get sick of having to write it all down.

I'm all old-school with the legal pad and pencil, but thanks to new-fangled smart phones, it's easier than ever to track your food intake. Apps like My Fitness Pal, My Plate, and My Food Diary have a database of foods with all their nutrition information. Most of these apps will remember your food and recipes as you log them, so you don't have to type them in every time. They offer a variety of features, including graphs, charts and reminders, depending on what app you choose.

My legal pad doesn't do any of that.

I do not recommend keeping a food journal constantly, though. It will suck every ounce of enjoyment from eating, and you will eventually hate your life. I want you to enjoy eating. Food is delicious and fun to eat. Mealtime should not be drudgery.

Therefore, I think it's a good thing to do a few times a year for maybe a week or two, at the most, just to get you back on track when you've strayed. It's also helpful when you reach a weight-loss plateau or when you are trying to identify food sensitivities.

Great job with all your hard work, by the way. You've got your plan and you've got your eating on track. You're halfway through this process already!

That could only mean one thing.

It's time to move.

Literally.

# Phase Three: Move

# #13 Find An Exercise You Enjoy

*"I hate exercise."*

If there is a phrase that makes me a little crazy, it's that phrase.

I mean, if you said it, I wouldn't want to punch you or anything, but I would sort of want to shake your shoulders a little, maybe. And while I'm shaking (gently, *I'd shake gently*), I'd want to look you in the eye and launch into a lecture about how God created your body to move, and how well your body will perform under pressure, and how when you push your body beyond what you think it can do it, gets stronger—both mentally and physically, and how exercise is hard work, but dangit, *everything* worthwhile in life requires hard work!

And though you'd be somewhat frightened (what with all the shoulder shaking) you might also be persuaded to change your opinion about exercise.

If that's you, if you are the one who hates exercise, I promise not to shake you. But, I do want to talk you for a minute.

**You do not hate exercise. You simply have not found the exercise that's right for YOU.**

Most people who think they hate exercise really mean that they hate running. Or they hate staring at a wall while they walk on a treadmill. Or they hate driving to the gym and lifting weights alongside a bunch of meat-heads. Or they hate doing Zumba class because they trip over themselves. Or they hate putting in a DVD and working out alone in front of the television in their basement.

**It really means that *what they've tried*, they've hated.**

It means that their idea of exercise is very, very limited. They think if they don't do it this one certain way—the only way they know *and hate*—then it's not exercise, and it doesn't count.

Exercise (or what they define as exercise) is unpleasant and inconvenient, so it's the first thing to go when time runs short or days get stressful. Inevitably, exercise becomes the thing in life they despise and ultimately dread because now, not only is it unpleasant and inconvenient, but it also produces shame, because they keep putting it off.

**Unpleasant, inconvenient and shame-producing = “*I hate exercise.*”**

If you believe in the depths of your being that you hate exercise, here’s great news: If you experiment with some different things—think outside the box a little—you will find something you LOVE.

**I truly believe exercise can go from the thing you “hate” to the thing you look forward to the most, each day.**

It will become the thing you can’t live without—one of the highest priorities on your to-do list, simply because you enjoy it so much.

I believe this so passionately, that I dare you to test me on it. If I had a money-back guarantee, I’d insert it here. But this book was free, so...

Over the next few chapters, we’ll discuss all-things exercise. I’ll offer you some ideas for exercises to try. I help you figure out how much exercise is too much or not enough for you. I’ll help you figure out a way to work it into your busy week. I’ll do everything in my power to get you past the “I hate exercise” mentality.

Well, everything in my power, short of shaking your shoulders.

## #14 Pick A Cardiovascular Exercise And Try It

Cardiovascular exercise benefits the entire body. During cardiovascular exercise or aerobic activity, you repeatedly move large muscles in your arms, legs, and hips. This causes you to breathe faster and more deeply, which maximizes the amount of oxygen in your blood. Your heart beats faster, which increases blood flow to your muscles and back to your lungs. Your capillaries widen to deliver more oxygen to your muscles and carry away waste products, such as carbon dioxide and lactic acid. Your body eventually releases endorphins, which are natural painkillers that promote an increased sense of well-being.

Ahhhhh....

If you are one of those people who believes you are destined to be unfit and flabby because you “hate exercise,” then I have a treat for you.

Here is a comprehensive list of every cardiovascular exercise I could possibly think of. Pick one and try it. If you don’t like it, pick another. If you don’t like it, try another.

If anything, once you get to the end of the list and you’ve tried every last one, you will be in great shape.

Note, I sometimes differentiate between the same activity done in different settings (inside vs. outside, alone vs. in a group, etc). That’s because I find these to be very different. Walking on a treadmill, I HATE! Walking *outside*, I LOVE! For me, the outside-factor makes all the difference. Running, in general, my husband hates (me too!). Running *as training for part of a triathlon*, he loves (I still hate). For him, the whole competition thing makes the difference.

If I just wrote “Walk” you may not consider that you hate the one and love the other. I’ll do that sort of thing with a lot of them, just to help you think outside the box and find something you truly enjoy in a way you enjoy it.

*“A good walk cures most problems. Want to lose weight and get fit? Walk. Want to enjoy life but spend less? Walk. Want to cure stress and clear your head? Walk. Want to meditate and live in the moment? Walk. Having trouble with a life or work problem? Walk, and your head gets clear.”*

*~ Leo at Zen Habits ~*

## Cardiovascular Exercises to Try

- Walk on a treadmill
- Walk outside (my personal favorite!)
- Jog or run on a treadmill
- Jog or run outside
- Jog or run as training for a race or to raise money
- Elliptical, stair-climber, or row machine at home
- Elliptical, stair-climber, or row machine at the gym
- Stationary bike at home
- Stationary bike at the gym
- Spinning class
- Bicycling outside (casual biking, road biking, mountain biking)
- Bicycling to train for a race or to raise money
- Swim in a pool, inside or outside
- Swim in a lake or ocean
- Jump rope
- Play tennis
- Play handball
- Play racquetball
- Play soccer
- Play basketball
- Dance with a fitness DVD at home
- Dance in a group class, like Zumba
- Dance lessons, private or group
- Aerobics at home
- Aerobics at the gym, in a class
- Kickboxing DVD
- Kickboxing class
- Martial arts
- Plyometrics/jump training
- Boot Camp-type workouts, in a group
- Boot Camp DVD
- CrossFit
- Downhill ski
- Cross-country ski
- Rock climb
- Hike
- Jump on a trampoline

Please, I'm begging you, get up and move. Something is better than nothing, remember? If it's been awhile or if you've never truly exercised, don't pick the hardest one (Hint: that's CrossFit!)

Start slowly.

Grab a friend or your iPod, whichever you prefer. Surely, there is something here that looks interesting. Your job today is to pick one and try it.

# #15: Add Some Resistance Training

Cardio is great. I'm pro-cardio. But cardio will only take you so far.

Try as you might, you cannot get fit and stay fit on cardiovascular exercises alone. You must also build your muscle, especially if you are over 35. (Did you know our bodies stop producing their own muscle right about this time?)

All good exercise programs incorporate both cardio and resistance training. (For the ones I personally recommend, [click here](#).) But many women are *resistant to resistance* training. (See what I did there?)

If you are one of these resistance-resistant women, you probably fall into one of two camps: The Fear-of-Bulking up Camp, or the Not-Worth The Effort Camp.

## Fear of Bulking Up

I realize, if you are a lady, you don't want to look like a body builder. Neither do I. But have no fear! If you're a chick, you have almost no chance of that happening. If it does happen, if you do bulk up, one of two things are true:

1. You are not really a chick, but a dude.
2. You've been taking steroids and/or training for a body building competition.

In other words, you will not "bulk up" accidentally, because you, ladies, do not have enough testosterone in your sweet feminine bodies to make it happen. These things don't just happen by chance. I promise.

## Not Worth the Effort

The thought of adding another thing to your life may sound impractical or impossible. Especially if you already do some form of cardiovascular exercise on a regular basis. You may feel your cardio is good enough.

It *is* good. If you run or walk or bike or swim on a regular basis, then you are doing good things for your body, and I am proud of you. But resistance training has specific health benefits that enhance or exceed cardio exercise alone. Here are a few of them:

- It energizes you.

- It shapes your body.
- It helps your metabolism run more efficiently.
- It makes you strong, (obviously), and this strength gives you confidence and makes daily activities easier. (Think: picking up your kids, lifting heavy groceries, maintaining your home, navigating staircases, etc.)
- It makes you less prone to low-back injuries.
- It decreases your resting blood pressure.
- It decreases your risk of developing adult onset diabetes.
- It decreases your gastrointestinal transit time, reducing your risk for developing colon cancer.
- It increases your blood level of HDL cholesterol (the good type).
- It improves your posture.
- It improves the functioning of your immune system.
- It lowers your resting heart rate, a sign of a more efficient heart.
- It improves your balance and coordination.
- It elevates your mood.
- It strengthens your bones, which lowers your chance of developing osteoporosis.

## **Finding the Right Exercise**

Once you're convinced you need to do resistance training, (you're convinced now, right?) it's important to find resistance training you enjoy. Otherwise you will be all "*I hate exercise*" again. And you know how nutty that makes me.

Our options for resistance training dwindle a bit, compared to cardiovascular options. But we still have some choices.

All resistance training falls into one of two categories: Using actual weights or using body weight. Within those two categories, the cost varies significantly. The good news is, you can do resistance exercise for free, assuming you already own a body.

## **Using actual weights**

- Free weights, at a gym (not free in terms of cost, but free from a machine, as in dumbbells)
- Free weights, at home (least expensive option)
- Group classes, like Body Pump
- Weight machines at the gym
- Weight machine at home (expensive option!)

## **Using body weight**

- Push-ups, pull-ups, squats, planks at home (FREE!)
- Yoga or Pilates DVD at home
- Yoga or Pilates class at gym
- Boot Camp classes (these incorporate body resistance and cardio = time-saver!)
- Boot Camp type DVDs
- Pure Barre

## **Proper Form**

No matter what option you choose, proper form is essential. Doing any kind of weight resistance makes you vulnerable to injury if you perform the exercises wrong. Information about how to perform exercises properly is readily available, so there's really no excuse for any of us to be hurting ourselves due to improper form.

Working with a personal trainer is an excellent option, especially if you are a beginner. But trainers can be pricey. The good news is, any good DVD-driven program will show you proper form. You can also find many websites with tutorials and pictures, as well as free YouTube videos. If you can work out in front of a mirror, so you can actually watch yourself, it's even better.

Or you can come over to my house, and I'll help you out. Wouldn't that be fun? Though, you're probably afraid I might shake your shoulders. I wouldn't really shake you. Seriously, I wouldn't.

## #16: Know The Signs of a Good Workout

You do not have to work out hard every single day to be fit and healthy. In fact, working out too hard and too often is a recipe for injury, fatigue, illness, burnout, global warming, and world hunger (kidding).

That's the exact opposite of what you want to achieve when you are busting your butt, right?

With all the emphasis on hard-core training and extreme fitness, it's easy to get the impression that, unless you've pushed yourself to the point of exhaustion, you haven't truly worked out. I, for one, have made the mistake of training too hard for too long, or doing back-to-back-to-back workouts with no recovery time, resulting in chronic muscle soreness and fatigue.

I much prefer a workout schedule that leaves me feeling strong and refreshed, not sore and exhausted. I'm thinking you feel the same way.

So, let's talk about how often, how long and how hard you should train to gain optimal fitness. I promise, it's not as bad as you think. Well, at least it wasn't as bad as I thought.

Not long ago, I read [one of the best articles on exercise](#) I think I have ever read. It addressed a critical, but often ignored, area of exercise: Knowing how much exercise is "too much."

Dr. Jeff Spencer, Olympian, ICA "Sports Chiropractor of the Year," author, and one of America's top trainers of elite athletes explains that how you feel during and after exercise determines if you are working at ideal intensity and length.

For example, he says you should have a quick and full recovery (you should feel almost back to normal within about 30 minutes) after each workout. Also, you should feel better at the end of your workout than you did at the beginning. Slight soreness is okay—it's normal and expected after starting a new exercise or increasing intensity—but regular soreness isn't. If you don't recover quickly or you feel sore for days at a time, your workouts are too difficult and/or you need to increase your recovery time between workouts.

A cardinal sign of having the right training balance of effort to recovery is when your heart rate moves up and down nicely during a workout. If you can't get your heart rate up, you are training too hard too often.

Perspiration associated with workouts should stop within a few minutes after exercise. If you are still sweating 20-30 minutes later, your workout was too difficult.

Alternating “hard” days with “easy” days will help you achieve your fitness goals without overly straining your body. I, for one, like the idea that I can have some easy days, don’t you?

### **What is Hard?**

What’s hard for one person is not necessarily hard for the next person. Determining “hard” is all about perceived exertion, or how hard it feels *to you*.

In a “hard” workout, it is impossible to talk. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being sedentary and 10 being *“I am being chased by a man-eating lion and literally cannot go any faster or harder than I am”* a “hard” workout should be about a 9-10.

For me, a “hard” workout is sprinting or jogging uphill, most workouts in the Insanity program, the Plyometrics (jump training) workouts of the P90X series, as well as heavy weight training where I push myself to muscle failure (muscle failure = I can’t lift one more time if my life depended on it).

**A hard workout should only be done once or twice a week, with three days of easy workouts (and a day of complete rest) breaking them up.**

I was going to add CrossFit to that “hard” list, but CrossFit needs its own category called “ridiculous,” for me. Once upon a time, I tried CrossFit with my teenaged daughter, followed by a two-mile run with my younger daughter. I don’t want to be all braggy about my fitness level, but I thought I was going to need hospitalization. My legs...I’m not exactly sure what happened to them, but the muscles in my legs felt torn. Maybe like they accidentally got blended into my Vitamix when I was making my daily smoothie. Walking down stairs, walking up stairs, or walking on flat surfaces was excruciating, for days. DAYS, I TELL YOU! The only thing that did not produce intense pain was standing in one spot. I couldn’t stretch. I couldn’t sleep. I couldn’t use the restroom like a normal human. I cried a lot. The end.

## What is Easy?

Again, thinking “perceived exertion,” an easy workout is one where you can comfortably carry on a conversation with someone during the entire workout. On a scale of 1 to 10, Easy is maybe 3 to 5.

For me, that’s brisk walking outside, up to Level 3 on my elliptical, most yoga, and weight training with light weights.

**You should do three Easy workouts between each Hard workout. Or two Easy workouts between each Moderate workout. (Don’t worry, I’m going to show you what this means.)**

## What is Moderate?

A Moderate workout is one where you can speak in words, but not sentences. You can talk, but don’t want to talk. On a scale of 1 to 10, Moderate is 5 to 8.

For me, that’s weight-training with medium weights and low reps, advanced yoga, alternating jogging with walking, and most P90X workouts.

**You should do two or three moderate workouts a week, separated by two easy workouts.**

**One of the biggest mistakes people make in exercise is that they make their Hard days too easy and their Easy days too hard, resulting in a whole string of back-to-back Moderate workouts. This type of schedule will put too much strain on your body over the course of time, resulting in injury, fatigue, illness, and burnout.**

I, personally, find this information incredibly freeing. The fact that I don’t have to kill myself every single day makes me want to do a happy dance. (Which, incidentally, would be an Easy workout for me.)

In the next chapter, I will put all of this together for you and show you some simple ways to structure your workouts so you achieve maximum fitness with minimum bad stuff.

# #17: Create A Simple Workout Schedule

Your body is amazing, I am sure of that. There are a million reasons for its amazing-ness, not the least of which is its ability to tell you when it's had enough stress.

Stress can come in the form of crises or life-pressures, but it can also come in the form of hard exercise. If you put too much stress of any kind on your amazing body, it will begin to break down. That's why it's so important to strive for balance in all things, even your workouts.

In the last chapter, we defined "Hard," "Easy," and "Moderate" workouts, and established that you need to work Easy days between your Hard and Moderate days. Today, we're putting it all together and creating a Simple Workout Schedule, so we can make it all balance-like.

Keep in mind the following goals when you create your schedule:

1. To get a good mix of cardiovascular and resistance exercises, with regular stretching for flexibility.
2. To work every major muscle group over the course of about a week.
3. To allow time for your muscles to fully recover between workouts.

**Alternating Hard/Easy/Moderate workouts is one way to achieve this.**

I'm using my own idea of Hard/Moderate/Easy workouts in these samples, but you need to plug in what is Hard/Moderate/Easy for you.

## **Workout Week Sample One: Hard/Easy/Rest**

In this sample, I scheduled two Hard days, four Easy days, and one Rest day:

Monday: Hard Workout (P90X Plyometrics)  
Tuesday: Easy (30-45 minute brisk walk)  
Wednesday: Easy (30 minute level 3 elliptical)  
Thursday: Easy (30 minutes light yoga)  
Friday: Hard (P90X with heavy weights/muscle failure)  
Saturday: Easy (30-45 minute brisk walk)  
Sunday: Rest (no exercise)

## **Workout Week Sample Two: Moderate/Easy/Rest**

In this sample, I scheduled Three Moderate Days, Three Easy Days, and one Rest Day:

Monday: Moderate (P90X Legs and Back)  
Tuesday: Easy (30 minute brisk walk) or rest (no exercise)  
Wednesday: Easy (30 minute level 3 elliptical)  
Thursday: Moderate (P90X Core Synergistics)  
Friday: Easy (30-45 minute walk)  
Saturday: Rest (no exercise)  
Sunday: Moderate (P90X Chest, Shoulders, Triceps)

**Another way to create a simple and well-balanced workout schedule is to work different body parts on different days, allowing one body part to fully recover, while working out other body parts.**

I think the easiest way to achieve this is alternating Upper Body/Lower body/Cardio. Here's what a typical workout schedule would look like (I added a few more days to show how you continue to alternate different body parts, even into the following week, so you eventually work your entire body):

### **Workout Week Sample Three: Upper/Lower/Cardio**

Monday: Upper Body weights (biceps/triceps)  
Tuesday: Cardio (walk, run, swim, bike, etc)  
Wednesday: Lower Body weights (quads, glutes)  
Thursday: Cardio  
Friday: Upper Body weights (Shoulders, chest, back)  
Saturday: Cardio  
Sunday: Rest  
Monday: Lower Body Weights (calves, hamstrings, core)  
Tuesday: Cardio

If you are just starting out, it may seem like a pain to schedule your workouts and pay this much attention to your activity level. The good news is, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Most good DVD-driven workout programs, as well as good personal trainers, will schedule the workouts for you in some order that's similar to this. (I know I sound like an infomercial, but this very concept is what made me fall in love first with Body for Life, then Jillian Michaels, and eventually Beachbody. All of these programs do the work for you, by creating smart workout schedules, working different parts of the body on different days, or alternating Hard/Easy/Moderate.)

Over time though, it will become second nature to you. You will get to know your body and naturally recognize when it's time to cut back and when it's

time to push harder. Your weeks will fall into a natural rhythm of hard and easy, exercise and rest. Before you know it, you will look in the mirror and think, "*Sandy was right. My body IS amazing!*"

## #18: Keep a Simple Exercise Log

Once you have a good workout schedule in place, it's important to log some additional exercise details. Remember when we talked about food logs in Chapter 12? This is a lot like that.

I probably get a little more detailed with my exercise log than the average person. (That's a lie. The "average person" doesn't keep an exercise log.) I write down exactly what I did—how many repetitions, how much weight, how far I walked—what time of the day I did it, and how I felt when I was finished.

If I have a day where I can't finish because of time or fatigue or whatever, I write that down, too. This helps me mentally to know I did the best I could with the time I had (Something is better than nothing, right?).

All this keeps me accountable to myself and helps tremendously in future workouts. I know exactly what weights to grab the next time I do that same routine, which saves me time. I know exactly what I had trouble with, so I can challenge myself to work on my form or my endurance with that particular exercise. And it helps me see exactly the places I did really well, so I can push a little harder for more reps, more weight, or longer distance.

And bonus: When I compare my exercise log with my food log, it helps me pinpoint the best foods to eat before and after my workouts to perform and recover well. It's all great information to have on hand.

Like the food log, I would drive myself batty tracking all this information with such great detail every single day. So I don't. I only keep this kind of log sometimes.

For example, fitness logs are especially helpful when I'm working through a specific program (like P90X), because there are multiple workouts and multiple moves within each workout—it's easy to forget what I did last time or what weight I need to grab. Fitness logs are also helpful when I'm working toward a specific fitness goal and want to track my progress and keep improving.

While I don't keep a detailed log every day, I do keep a general log of daily workouts. It's super simple—just the date, what workout I did and for how long. This is because my brain gets mushy, and I sometimes forget what I did the day before. (I forget what workout I did yesterday, but I remember every lyric from "Bohemian Rhapsody".) I tape this log to the wall near my fitness equipment, so I can quickly assess what I have done so far this week

and what I need to do next. If you make a weekly workout schedule (like we discussed in the last chapter) at the beginning of each week, you won't need an ongoing log.

Your measurements log (Chapter 5), your food log (Chapter 12) and your exercise log should be BFFs. With these three logs on hand, you will be able to look over exactly what you are doing and how it's working so you can tweak where necessary.

It's also a very helpful tool, should you go to a personal trainer, a nutritionist, or a doctor. They will totally love you when you show up and say, *"This is what I eat, this is what I do, and this is how it's been working/not working."*

When they tell you how awesome you are for making their job so easy, you can take all the credit for looking so smart and thorough.

You're welcome.

# Phase Four: Live

## #19: Play and Work

A big fitness mistake many people make is compartmentalize workouts into a little box of time. As in, “*I will go to work, go grocery shopping, do some laundry, and then exercise.*” There is a place for this kind of thing, for sure. I mean, a good, dedicated workout is very effective. I spent the last several chapters talking about these workouts. I try to do a dedicated workout about five days a week.

But living a healthy life is more than finding 45 minutes for a DVD routine in the living room. **It’s much easier to stay fit when we integrate movement into what we are already doing.**

For the last 18 years, I’ve been home raising kids and writing in my spare time. Each season of parenting poses unique challenges with regard to fitness. My current season requires me to be in my car a lot—sometimes four or five hours a day—carting kids to school and activities, waiting in carpool lines. Add to that the hours I spend sitting and writing, and I can easily be sedentary 10 hours a day. A 45-minute workout is not enough to counterbalance 10 hours of sitting.

**So, I look for opportunities to move throughout my normal day.**

In the winter, my natural instinct tells me to brew tea, grab a blanket and a book, and sit by the fire. However, I override that instinct (sometimes) by taking advantage of snow days, sledding with my kids, building snowmen, and shoveling the sidewalk.

As the days get longer and warmer, I try to spend more time with them on the trampoline, shooting baskets in the driveway, going to the park, or simply walking through the neighborhood after dinner. (My children’s natural instinct tells them to turn on their favorite screen and stare at it for 10 hours a day. So, imagine the excitement in their little hearts when I announce we are turning off the TV/PS4/iPhone/computer and going for a family walk! I think it was Jerry Seinfeld who said, “*There’s no such thing as fun for the whole family.*” We prove this statement true daily.)

Up until last year, we had a neighborhood pool, which was about a half mile away from our house. A few times a week in the summer, we’d walk to the pool as a family, and I’d swim with them. (Okay, I’d sit under an umbrella with a book and relax, too. I won’t lie.)

I also take advantage of exercise opportunities throughout the normal day as I go about my housework. We’ve all heard a thousand times how we

should park far away and take the stairs instead of the elevator. I do both of those things. But I also do these things:

- Throughout the day, I walk up and down the stairs in my home as many times as I can. I used to stockpile toys and shoes on the staircase and save them for one big trip at the end of the day. Now, I put things away as I find them, just to move more, even if it's just to put away one thing.
- I take advantage of laundry baskets and garbage bags, carrying them through the house. Sometimes, I will walk through my house doing walking lunges—sometimes while also carrying laundry baskets or garbage bags. (I'm such a freak.) It doesn't take any more time, but I get a good leg workout.
- When I'm pulling laundry out of the dryer to fold or hang, rather than bending over at the waist and pulling the entire load into a basket, I will go down into a full squat and lift the items out one at a time. I can get thirty squats in doing that—especially with a load of socks!
- Our mailbox is at the end of a 900-foot, hilly driveway. Rather than grabbing the mail when I'm driving in, I pull into the garage and walk back to the mailbox instead.
- Sometimes rather than sitting in a chair while I write, I will put my laptop on the kitchen counter and stand. Or I'll stand and eat. Or I'll stand while I'm checking emails. I try to remain on my feet as much as possible during the day, lest I sit down and fall asleep.
- I know of one mom who would push her baby in a stroller, but then lift weights to strengthen her upper body. She saw the contradiction in this behavior and ditched the stroller entirely, deciding she would carry her baby to strengthen her upper body. I never went that far, but I did “wear” my babies as often as was practical.



Today, I want you to think about your normal life and look for ways to incorporate movement into it. Is there a place you normally drive that you could walk to instead? Are there things (groceries, babies, etc.) you normally push in a cart that you could carry instead?

If you work outside the home, can you walk on your lunch break? Can you sit on a stability ball at your desk? Can you stand when you would normally sit? Can you do walking lunges across the office while carrying a garbage bag? Never mind. If you value your reputation, that last one may not be the best option for you, freak.

## #20: Rest Without Guilt

I take naps.

When I say this out loud to actual people, they sometimes respond with a passive-aggressive, “*Must be nice.*” As if I just told them, “*I receive full-body massages and sugar scrubs in expensive day-spas with white fluffy robes and iced-cucumber water. In Aruba.*”

Most people view naps as self-indulgent, frivolous, and lazy. Even with everything I know about health and the benefits of rest, I fight the temptation to view naps this way, too. Sometimes, when I lie down at 1:00 PM for 30 minutes, I have to remind myself I’m not a slug. I have to mentally rehearse all the reasons naps are good and necessary for my health.

I realize not all of you have the opportunity to take a mid-day nap. It’s definitely a perk of the stay-at-home/work-from-home-mom job description.

(If you work away from home, you get other perks—like *money*. So, it all evens out in the end.)

But this chapter is not about naps. It’s about the *guilt surrounding rest*. If we are going to reach our fitness goals and live healthy, well-balanced lives, **we must balance all our hard work with periods of rest.**

### Rest From Hard Workouts

As we already discussed in Chapters 16 and 17, if you have a schedule of Hard and Moderate workouts, you need to take regular breaks from exercise to give your body time to recover and build muscle. I recommend one or two days a week, depending on the difficulty of your workout routine, where you do not exercise at all, except for maybe a walk, yoga, or light stretching. Be proactive about this. Don’t wait until you hit the wall to decide you need a rest day. Schedule it in, just as you would a workout.

In addition to a regularly scheduled recovery day, you may also need an occasional recovery *week*. Many difficult Beachbody workouts (P90X, X2, X3 and Insanity) schedule this as part of the program. Every three to five weeks, you take a break from the normal workout schedule for a few days before you launch into the next phase of higher intensity. It’s “active recovery,” so you are not sedentary; but neither are you lifting heavy

weights or doing high intensity cardio. Instead, you are doing light cardio, yoga, Pilates, and stretching. All this is great for over-all balance in your fitness routine.

## **Rest in the Form of Sleep**

Almost half of us are chronically sleep-deprived. We walk around all day irritable and exhausted, but refuse to discipline ourselves to go to bed early or—*gasp!*—take a 30-minute nap, because of the guilt and stigma associated with it. Instead, we'd rather exist on caffeine-by-day and prescription sleep aids-by-night. Our sleep problems are so severe, the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) calls them “a public health epidemic.”

Not getting enough sleep deprives your brain of oxygen and adversely affects judgment, focus, and eyesight. Sleep deprivation weakens your immune system, making you more susceptible to contracting illness. Several studies have shown a significant and direct correlation between sleep deprivation and weight-gain/obesity in adults and children.

*But wait, there's more!*

Sleep deficits have been implicated in many major public catastrophes, including the oil spill of the Exxon Valdez, the destruction of the space shuttle Challenger, and the nuclear accidents at Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, and Peach Bottom.\*

You need good sleep—the daily, high-quality kind. Whether you work from home or away from home, work first shift or third shift, work days, nights, or weekends, **you need good sleep every single day.**

*“Sleep is really a behavior that has been ignored.  
Everybody talks about diet and exercise,  
but nobody pays much attention to sleep.”*

~Fred Turek, MD,  
Director of the Sleep Center at Northwestern University~

Here are some of the many benefits of getting adequate sleep:

- God created your body to need sleep. In fact, all creatures in nature sleep.

- Napping improves memory, increases vigor, and decreases late afternoon lethargy.
- During nightly sleep, glands, and muscles rejuvenate, growth hormone is released, damaged cells repair themselves, and newly-learned information is synthesized and saved into long-term memory.
- Sleep improves focus and concentration.
- Those who get adequate sleep have fewer incidents of depression, anxiety, type 2 diabetes, and chronic skin conditions.
- In children, each additional hour of sleep decreases the child's chances of becoming obese by 9%.

Good sleep is essential for health. Don't let anyone—even yourself—shame you into thinking otherwise.

### **Rest from Mental Stress and Weekly Work**

In the Bible, we read where God commanded the Israelites to observe a Sabbath: an entire day, every single week, whereby the people and animals were to do absolutely nothing. And I mean, *nothing*.

God wasn't merely offering a Sabbath *suggestion*, either. If the Israelites disobeyed this commandment to rest, they were put to death. (See Exodus 31:14). God wasn't messing around about this.

Sabbath (or Shabbat, as it is called in Hebrew) continues to be the most important religious observance in Judaism. From sunset Friday to sunset Saturday, the Jewish Shabbat is a day devoted to rest and spiritual enrichment.

Similarly, some Christians still refer to Sunday as The Sabbath and honor it by attending worship service and refraining from work.

It's not just a religious thing, though. Historically, countries worldwide including the U.S., have implemented laws regulating business operations to observe a weekly day of rest for workers on Sunday. This, unfortunately, has changed quite a bit in the last few decades, with all but a few businesses opening for full hours of operation, seven days a week. In a society obsessed with productivity and profit, Sabbath is becoming

counter-cultural. We simply can't rely on the government or society to mandate our Sabbath rest.

Not that government mandates would have ever applied to me. As a stay-at-home mom/writer, my work never really ends. I don't clock out or drive away from my office. One day of work bleeds right into the next—even holidays and vacations feel like work (extra work, actually) with all the cooking and cleaning. I'd love to hang a sign around my neck that says, "Closed on Sundays." But alas, the children continue to need food and clean underwear, even on Sunday. Therefore, it becomes all the more vital for me to be intentional about my rest, or I'll burn out completely.

And so will you.

Many of you work outside the home (some in two or three jobs) *and* care for a family. You walk in the door at the end of your workday, only to be greeted by more work. You are exhausted. I'm exhausted just thinking about your exhaustion. You, more than anyone, need one day a week of guilt-free rest from your work.

Today, I'm giving you permission to do so.

I realize it's not that easy. Setting aside work for an entire day may sound impractical or impossible. But I have found that establishing a few Sabbath guidelines helps make it work for me and my family.

- **Define it:** Rest for me is the opposite of my normal work. So on my Sabbath day I don't do laundry, clean the house, or cook. And since so much of my writing involves interaction on social media, I will sometimes unplug from the internet—especially Facebook—as well. Instead, I do activities that are the opposite of work for me. I read book. I take long walks or have an extended exercise time. I eat dinner at a restaurant. I relax with my family. I spend time outdoors.

Your Sabbath should be what is restful *to you*. I mean, if you are a farmer, maybe you need to come indoors and catch up on Facebook. I don't know.

- **Prepare:** In order to pull this off every week, I need a day before my Sabbath to prepare. I do a few extra loads of laundry, I stock up the fridge with easy-to-grab food for my kids, and I protect the calendar from activities and errands that feel stressful to me. So, I suggest you prepare your home like you do when you are going on a vacation. (It will feel like a mini-vacation, so why not?) If you are just starting

to implement a Sabbath into your week, you may want to prepare your family and your employer, as well.

- **Be Flexible:** Sometimes, because of schedules, I can't take my Sabbath on the same day each week (which, for me, is usually Saturday). So, I do what I can, when I can. Sometimes, I move it to Sunday. Sometimes, I move it to Friday. Sometimes, I do a half-day. The important thing is that I rest from work every week for a little while.



It's time to stop the self-imposed guilt trip for resting. Nothing about rest is self-indulgent, frivolous, or lazy. It's nature's way of recharging your body, so you can continue working toward your goals—fitness and otherwise.

Look at your schedule. Are you taking regular days off from hard workouts? Are you getting enough sleep? Are you taking regular weekly breaks from your work? This is your priority today. This is how you stay in the game for the long-term. You will be amazed at how much better you feel with adequate rest.

So the next time you take a nap, take a break, or take the day off, and someone says to you, "*Must be nice,*" look into their sleep-deprived, bloodshot eyes and respond with a confident, "*Yes. Yes, it is.*"

\*Most of the facts in this chapter were taken from the book [\*Sleep: It Does A Family Good, How Busy Families Can Overcome Sleep Deprivation\*](#), by Dr. Archibald D. Hart.

## #21: Show Up

One of the biggest challenges of any workout is getting started. I don't mean starting a workout program after a prolonged period of no exercise. I mean getting started *every day, for every workout.*

*"An object at rest stays at rest  
and an object in motion stays in motion  
with the same speed and in the same direction  
unless acted upon by an unbalanced force."*

*~Newton's First Law~*

When my kids were babies, I would get up at 5:00 AM so I could drive to the gym and back before my husband had to leave for work at 7:30 AM. I would drive to the gym in the dark, have the entire gym to myself, and drive home while the sun was rising. It was nutty, but it worked well for me at the time. (Don't be too impressed. I also napped with them every afternoon and waited to shower until 5:00 PM—after Oprah.)

I remember a good friend asking me, *"Is it ever hard for you to get out of bed and drive to the gym in the dark?"* Based on the surprised look on her face, I think she was expecting me to say it was easy most days and hard some days. But this is what I responded:

*"It's always hard. Every single day, it's hard. When the alarm goes off, I always want to choose sleep over getting up. Always. I can't even think about working out when the alarm is going off. The best I can do is force myself get out of bed and into my workout clothes I laid out the night before. That's it. Then I force myself to brush my teeth. Then I force myself to make a pot of coffee. It isn't until I'm in my car with coffee in hand that I'm okay with the fact that I woke up so early, just to sweat."*

You'd think after three decades of regular exercise, I would have moved past that. That I'd be all, *"This is easy for me."* But most days I still have to force myself to start. I can think of multiple things I'd rather do/should do/need to do besides exercise.

On really hard days, I will tell myself, *"Just do 10 minutes."* I'll promise myself, if I get to 10 minutes and want to stop, I'll let myself stop.

**I promise myself this, because I know if I can just get moving, I won't want to stop.**

In fact, I don't think I've ever stopped at 10 minutes, unless I was pressed for time (or a kid puked or broke a bone or something). I find that my body responds quickly to the motion, and I want to finish my workout. Every single time.

So, my little tip for you today is to simply show up, put on your workout clothes, grab your water bottle, and start. Every day, make it your goal to be present and accounted for at your workout. By showing up, you've already won half the battle.

*"Keep showing up.  
Keep pushing play."*

*~Tony Horton, Creator of P90X~*

## #22 Be Accountable

We all have those friends who think it's perfectly fine to be plump. They are the ones who equate "really living" with "eating dessert." They are the ones who will tease you for ordering the salad and broiled fish, or for bringing the fruit salad to the picnic, or for refusing the seven-layer-chocolate cake. They'll tell you life's too short to deprive yourself.

They are also the ones who have digestive problems, insomnia, chronic fatigue, and pre-diabetes.

### **Don't listen to them.**

When I was in college, this plump evangelist came to our church and asked me out for lunch. He took me to the mall food court—which was my first clue this relationship was headed nowhere. He went to the greasy fast-food place and ordered a bacon double-cheeseburger, super-sized fries, and a giant milkshake. I went to the salad place and ordered a beautiful and colorful super-sized salad and a giant water.

He mocked me repeatedly, calling my lunch "rabbit food." I thought, "*Sweet Baby Moses in a basket, when will I be released from this torture?*" (Dating 101: Don't Mock The Cute College Girl You Asked Out To Lunch.) Needless to say, I never saw him again. Primarily, because—how do I say this kindly?—I did not give The Plump Mocking Evangelist my phone number. I don't know where he is now—but I'm guessing it involves "cardiac care". I hope he found his junk food soul-mate.

Contrast with this, another guy who asked me out a few years later. This guy had just left the gym and was looking very buff and tan and handsome in his tank top when he asked for my number. I totally gave it to him, because: buff and tan and handsome. He took me to a cute local pizza place, where we split a pizza and both ordered salad. Note: He did not mock me for having veggies on my side of the pizza. A few months later, in the middle of a Saturday morning run in our favorite park, he got down on one knee and pulled out an engagement ring. Twenty-three years later, I'm still wearing it. And he's still buff and handsome.

The point is: don't surround yourself with people who undermine your efforts to be healthy. Instead, gather a support team of like-minded individuals. The ones who understand what you are trying to accomplish and support you through the good days and the rough days. Even if your "team" is just one person—accountability partners will make your journey to health successful and fun.

A few years ago, a group of my friends and I decided to be accountable to one another as we embarked on a clean eating program. Every day for a few months, we e-mailed our food log to each other. Every day we included at the end of our logs a section called “**What I Didn’t Eat.**”

Don’t you sometimes want to tell someone all the things you *wanted* to eat, but *refused* to eat? Don’t you sometimes want to tell someone, “*I turned down the muffin on the break-room table*”?

Do you know what it’s like to get six e-mails back that say, “*Wow! Way to go! You rock*”? It’s refreshing and encouraging.

And this, from a person who generally dislikes accountability. When I’m standing at the ice cream counter, and my accountability partner asks, “*Why are you here?*” I want to respond, “*Go away, peasant. This is none of your concern.*”

Rarely do I go into an accountability situation thinking, “*This is awesome. I’m excited to tell these people what I’m eating and how I napped instead of walked.*” I don’t usually enjoy people all up in my business. But accountability usually changes what I do. Healthy community is the key to making better choices.

That is precisely the reason I force myself to be accountable to someone, primarily when I have specific fitness goals. Sometimes, it’s through a group of friends as I described above. Sometimes, I lead a Facebook group. Sometimes, I text a friend. Sometimes, I tell my husband. And sometimes I write about it on my blog.

So today, if you don’t already have someone cheering you on, find someone. Say, “*Hey, I’m doing this healthy thing, and I was wondering if you want to do it with me.*” If you don’t have someone in your actual life, find an online group. Whatever you do, don’t do it alone.

And remember, don’t choose an accountability partner who takes you to the mall food court and makes you feel stupid for eating vegetables.

## #23 Don't Chase Perfect

I recently found an old picture of myself. In it, I was a 20-year-old college student on spring break, wearing a bathing suit. Amazing and deflating to me was that, as hard as I work out and as well as I eat today, I do not look like that any longer. In fact, when I was 20, I worked out a lot less and ate things I'd never eat today (I'm looking at you, Cherry 7-Up and Taco Bell taco salad in a deep-fried shell!).

When I found the picture, I considered taping it to my bathroom mirror as a motivator to keep pressing toward my goal to lose the last few pounds of the weight I had gained on Lexapro.

But then, I looked at it again, long and hard. Sure, I had like 2% body fat, chiseled abs, and crazy muscle tone in my thighs and arms. But that was 27 years ago. I've lived, like, 1,000 lifetimes since then. Is it even realistic to chase after a pre-baby, 20-year-old college body?

Or Jennifer Aniston's body? (I'm, what you might call, obsessed with Jennifer Aniston. She doesn't age. It's like she's in a time warp. We are the same age, but she looks like she's 30 and I look like I'm 47. Where are her wrinkles? Where are the veins and bumps on her thighs? Someone, please help me understand! I don't get it.)

Or Jennifer Lopez's body? (I'm obsessed with her, too. For all the same reasons.)

Or *Glamour* Magazine's computer-generated version of the perfect body?

I decided, no. No, it is *not*.

**Rather than chasing what I would perceive as a "perfect" version of my body, or someone else's perfect body, I am chasing health.** I want to be healthy, fit, and energetic. That's all I'm chasing, nothing more.

I challenge you to do the same. Put away the proverbial 20-year-old skinny pictures, the magazine covers, or whatever the mental image of perfection is to you.

Instead...

Eat whole foods.

Drink lots of water.

Move often.

Rest well.

Strive to live a well-balanced life, full of loving and serving the people around you. Live a life of thankfulness to the God who has graciously given you everything you need.

That is the real recipe for health and wellness. Not a 20-year-old skinny picture.

Besides, I was cute in college, but I wasn't very wise. Today, I'd choose wise over cute any day.

## #24 Do Your Best, Then Just a Little More

Jesse Itzler first met David Goggins at a 100-mile run in San Diego. Jesse was running as part of a six-person relay team. David was running the entire race by himself. Jesse and his friends came prepared with a tent, a lot of food, and masseuses. David came prepared with a lawn chair, a bottle of water, and a bag of crackers.

Jesse was like, “*Who is this guy?*” He had never seen anything like it.

During the race, he kept his eye on David. By around mile 70, David had broken all the small bones in both feet and had kidney damage, yet he still managed to finish the entire 100-mile race.

Jesse was so intrigued with David that after the race, he Googled him. Turns out, David Goggins is currently the World Record holder for most pull-ups done in 24-hours (4,025), a fifth place finisher in the Badwater 135—a 135-mile race in Death Valley, and an Ironman triathlete.

He’s also a Navy SEAL.

That’s when Jesse made a gutsy move. He contacted David and invited him to stay in Jesse’s home for 31 days so David could train him. Jesse writes about the entire experience in his book, *Living With a SEAL*.

The first day David came to live with Jesse, he asked Jesse how many pull-ups he could do. Jesse hopped up on the bar and did eight. David told him to take 30 seconds and do it again. This time, Jesse could only do six—struggling. David told him to take 30 seconds and do it again. This time, Jesse barely squeaked out four, before his arms completely failed him.

Then David told him to do 100 more.

One hundred more? Seriously? Jesse was done. He couldn’t do one more, let alone 100 more. But David told him they weren’t leaving until he did.

So, guess what? He did.

It took over an hour, but Jesse did 100 more pull-ups. One at a time.

Jesse Itzler thought he could only do eight pull-ups, but discovered he could actually do 118. That’s insane. That day, David proved to Jesse what he calls “The 40% Rule.” That is, when your mind is telling you you’re done, you’re only 40% done.

We all have a reserve of energy, strength, endurance, and fortitude that exists beyond our comfort zone. Getting stronger, getting healthier, getting better in anything isn't only about will-power, or programs, or dietary guidelines, or even resilience. **It's also about learning to access your reserve tank when you think you just can't go any further.**

I do not aspire to run an ultra-marathon. I do not aspire to run any marathon, actually. Neither do I wish to do 100 pull-ups. Not today, or any day.

**But I do want to grow. I do want to change. I do want to be better and stronger today than I was yesterday.**

So lately, rather than doing the workout I always do, lifting the free-weight I always lift, walking the route I always walk, I'm asking myself,

Can I go 10 more minutes?

Can I lift five more pounds?

Can I add two more reps?

Can I do one more push-up?

And guess what? I can! Even when I think I'm done—like, *done-done*—I can push myself and do a little more. This is making me stronger, both physically and mentally.

What if every single time you feel like you've reached your limit, you dug into your reserve tank and found the strength and endurance to do a little more?

Just a *little* more?

*Just one more?*

What if you think you can only do eight but you can actually do 118?

**You can do so much more than you realize.**

Today, I want you to push yourself to your limit. And when you reach that limit, I want you to go a little further. Do just a little more. Just one more.

And then do it again tomorrow.

## #25: Stick With It!

I'm a sucker for a good fitness success story. That's one of the reasons I love the P90X infomercial. (Are you so sick of me talking about P90X? I know I am.)

On the rare day that I'm flipping through the TV channels, I will sometimes stop when I see "*Get Ripped in 90 Days.*" Those "before" and "after" photos get me every time! It's one success story after another. And it inspires me.

Once while watching the infomercial, I was drawn to one man's "before" picture. I don't remember his weight, but he was very overweight. His "after" picture, though, was totally buff. Like, WOW-buff!

While P90X is an excellent program, it seemed unrealistic that he'd change his body that drastically in only three months.

And I was right.

After listening to his entire story, I learned he actually went through the complete program, including the diet, five times. That's not three months. That's *15 months*. One year and three month's worth of discipline, focus, muscle confusion, and clean eating. Amazing and impressive. No wonder his body changed so much.

What if he would have stopped after the initial 90 days? What if, after a full round of P90X, (still amazing and impressive), he'd decided he had not reach his goals, and quit?

Recently, I saw a similarly drastic "before" and "after" pic in *Health Magazine*, only this time it was a woman. She had lost a ton of weight (not literally a ton, but you know), and it didn't happen overnight. Her transformation took over four years.

Not four months.

*Four years.*

What if she would have stopped after the first month and said, "*I only lost three pounds. This isn't happening fast enough for me. I'm done?*"

I have this mental thing where I decide to eat salad and grilled chicken for dinner, skip dessert, and then expect to lose two pounds the following day. Every time I have a great eating day, I want to see immediate results on the

scale. (Of course, I want the opposite to be true when I have a bad eating day. I want the scale to forgive my sins—as far as the east is from the west.) Even with everything I know about fitness and nutrition, I still hope the weight will “fall off my body” with minimal effort.

We’ve all been enticed—and ultimately disappointed—by programs that promise rapid results. I just received this solicitation via e-mail yesterday: **“Lose 25 pounds of fat in 25 days!”** I almost bought it. I thought, *“Maybe there’s something in here I don’t know yet. Maybe there’s new science only this author knows about. Something that will finally help me shed my excess thigh-matter.”*

(Thigh-matter. Ha! I just made that up.)

We’re all hoping that something out there will help us reach our fitness goals in the least amount of time possible. No matter how many times we read the fine print *“Results not typical,”* we secretly hope that they will be *“typical”* for us.

This is where I tell you what you probably don’t want to hear. This is where I say, long after your 3-day cleanse, or your 30-day challenge, or your 90-day workout program, or your 25 little things, if you really want to reach your goals, **you will need to keep eating whole foods and keep showing up for your workouts.**

**Forever.**

This is where I remind you that 3 days/30 days/90 days/25 things is a great start, but it’s just that: *a start.*

This is where I tell you that real transformation happens over the long-term.

**This is where I tell you, you *can* totally get ripped, but for most of you, it won’t be in 90 days.**

So, if you woke up this morning thinking, *“This isn’t happening fast enough for me,”* please take a deep breath and commit to being healthy for the long term.

Don’t give up.

Whatever you do, just stick with it. Forever.

# Conclusion

I recently heard an interview with figure skater and Olympic Gold Metalist, Scott Hamilton. In describing the early days of his figure skating training, he said the first thing his coach taught him was how to fall. *Not how to stay upright, but how to fall.*

In ice-skating, his coach explained, it wasn't a matter of *if* he would fall, but *how* he would fall.

Falling improperly, Hamilton explained, would cause injury. Injury would, in turn, disrupt his progress—temporarily or forever.

Falling well, however, would preserve his joints, his ligaments, his bones, and his muscles. Preservation of his body would ensure he could continue to train hard and pursue his dream of winning an Olympic Gold Metal.

And he did.

As you finish this book and move toward your fitness goals, you will fall. It's not a matter of if you will fall, but how you will fall.

You will forget to plan, eat the wrong thing, skip a workout, and stay up too late. You will. Falling is inevitable. But how you fall determines your success.

You can choose to fall improperly. You can berate yourself for your mistake, decide you suck, sit down with a basket of outdated Easter candy, and stuff your face until you vomit.

Or you can choose to fall well. You can pay attention to how badly you feel when you eat poorly, so you remember to choose healthy food instead. You can take a few minutes to block out time for your next workout so you don't *accidentally on purpose* delete it from the schedule again. You can take note of the pitfalls on your path and avoid that route the next time.

You can get back up, brush the ice shavings off your butt, and try again.

It's your choice. How you fall determines your success.

So, fall well.

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## About the Author:

Sandy Cooper is a freelance writer, Bible study teacher, and author of her personal blog, [The Scoop on Balance](#). A self-proclaimed health-nut, she has blogged about fitness and nutrition since 2008, when blogs came etched on stone tablets. Her passion is to encourage women to live a life of balance through intimacy with God and hearing His voice in everyday life. Her greatest accomplishments include surviving the death of her 9-month-old son (Noah), surviving a seven-year battle with clinical depression, and finding a laundry system that actually works (the search for which may or may not have contributed to the depression). She likes lists (and parenthetical phrases.) She lives in Louisville, Kentucky with Jon (her husband of 22 years) and her three living children Rebekah (16), Elijah (14) and Elliana (9).