

---

# MyLifeYoga's Guide To Health

**Quick guide to good health.**

---

2015 Edition.



---

## Introduction

Health is surprisingly easy to achieve. Our mind-body is naturally structured to receive good health. All we have to do is to remove obstructions that hinder it from flowing freely into our lives. This guide provides an easy path to do this.



---

## The Three Legs of Health

An easy way to understand good health is to view it as a “three legged stool”. For the stool to be stable all three legs have to be strong. If any one leg is broken the stool topples over. The three legs of good health are:

- Diet
- Stress & Lifestyle
- Activity



---

## Diet

We normally take medicine to restore health. But in ancient times humans considered “food as medicine”. They understood that to remain in good health it was necessary to eat healthy food. Rather than take medicine to restore health, it may be a better idea to stay healthy by eating healthy food. Poor eating habits are a huge obstacle in the way of good health. It is easy to fix this by making suitable changes in what we eat and the way we eat.



More on healthy food in the coming pages. But first the second leg of good health: Stress and Lifestyle.

---

## Stress and Lifestyle

A good way to understand stress is to view it as the single biggest obstacle in the way of good health. While most know that stress is bad, what is usually lacking is the understanding of its connection with lifestyle. Once we see this connection we find it easier to make changes in our lifestyle that cause stress. This then flows back into our life as good health.



We shall talk on stress and lifestyle shortly. But next is the third leg of health: Activity.

---

## Activity

“Activity” is a broad category. It refers to the stuff we do. There are two ways we do stuff. One increases our stress levels while the other decreases it. Usually it is not the activity itself that causes harm. It is the manner we do it. So while it is widely recommended to be physically and mentally active, we must understand that this should be done in a manner that lowers our stress and not add to it. If an activity is creative, fun and engaging, and is not harmful to others then it will help keep us healthy. Life operates on a “use it or lose it” principle. To remain healthy we must remain active and engaged and we should learn to do it in a stress-free manner. If you take this lesson to heart then you would have gained a valuable secret of good health.



There are certain activities like yoga that engage our mind-body and also help reduce stress. It is important to incorporate such activities in our life to remove obstacles to health. More of this and other such activities later.

---

## Food is NOT Just Calorie

What we eat is very important for our health. Sadly this very rich topic of food has been over simplified in recent time to one metric: Calorie. To judge the life giving value of food by this one single metric is like judging the value of a book by its weight. We can have a very healthy food that is high in calories and a very unhealthy food that is zero calories. Take one example: A poison may be zero calories, but ingesting it can be fatal. On the same lines Avocado is high calories, but eating it occasionally can be quite healthy. The calorie measure just warns us not to overdo it, that is all. But sadly people completely avoid such health-giving food because of its Calorie content.

It is important to understand that our body already has a marvelous in-built “energy regulation” mechanism. This mechanism regulates our hunger and it decides how much energy to store and how much to burn. Why then do we try to outsmart this inbuilt mechanism? Isn't it more important to understand what comes in the way of its smooth functioning? The answer in one word is STRESS. So rather than trying to outsmart our body's inbuilt energy regulatory mechanism, we must focus on removing obstacles in the way of its smooth functioning.

*Key takeaway: Calorie is not the be-all end-all of food.*

For more details refer:

[Two Models Of Weight Loss](#)

[Six Things To Know About Dieting And Weight Loss](#)

[Five Secrets Of Long Term Weight Loss](#)

[Ten New Ways To Look At Weight Loss](#)

---

## Fat, Carbs, and Proteins

Food contains things like: Fat, Carbs, and Proteins. Unfortunately we associate labels such as “good” and “bad” to these. So some people consider fats as “bad” or proteins as “good”. Sadly this does not get us further into understanding food and puts us in needless debates. There is a better way to understand food:

- Prefer home cooked food over factory produced food.
- Eat whole foods rather than over processed foods.
- Avoid all food with added sugar. (more on this shortly)
- To properly digest food and absorb all its nutrients we need fat. Make sure your food has fat in moderation.
- Food that is baked, fried, burnt, or glazed can generate chemicals known as AGE (Advanced Glycation End-products). These gum up our system and such intake should be minimized.
- Prefer eating fresh over stale.
- Make sure you get probiotic food like Yogurt. This is vital for gut health.
- Do not neglect super foods like: fruits, nuts, herbs, spices, berries, and coffee.
- As much as possible eat organic.
- If you can avoid GMO food that may be worth considering especially if you have allergies or inflammatory condition.

*Key takeaway:*

*Head to the produce section of your grocery store.*

*Brown bag your meal when you head to work.*

For more details refer:

[Food Resolutions You Won't Regret](#)

[Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen](#)

[Do One Thing](#)

---

## How You Eat is Important!

In our obsession on *what* to eat let us not forget the importance of *how and when to eat*, and *what to do after eating*. Here are a few insights:

- Eat slowly and mindfully while seated.
- Stop eating just before the point of full satiety.
- Chew your food fully before swallowing.
- Do not take next morsel before swallowing the one already in the mouth.
- Enjoy the meal and take the time to notice its rich taste.
- Do not eat hurriedly or while standing, walking, running or driving.
- If possible avoid watching TV or browsing while eating.
- Do not sit or get to work immediately after the meal. Take a light 10 minute walk.
- Do not do any strenuous physical or mental activity immediately after a meal.
- Ideally the afternoon meal should be the heaviest meal of the day.



*Key takeaway: By eating mindfully, you will enjoy more and eat less.*

For more details refer:

[Seven Insights Into Mindful Eating](#)

---

## Welcome to Super Foods!

There are some foods that should not be missed. These are:

- Herbs and Spices - Herbs and spices add flavor and color to your meal and they have vital health giving properties. Our favorite: Turmeric. To be taken with crushed pepper.
- Fruits and Berries - These have extraordinary health giving properties and they are enjoyable.
- Coffee - You may be surprised to find coffee in the list of super foods. This is because it has been found to protect our liver and extend life when consumed minus sugar and creamer. Best to have in the morning so it does not affect our sleep.
- Nuts - Sadly some people avoid nuts in fear of their fat content. But nuts, unlike almost any other food category, have been found to increase life expectancy. Nuts are tasty and filling and you should plan to eat them daily: Unroasted and unsalted. Our favorites: Walnuts, pecans, and almonds.



*Key takeaway: Do not forget super foods!*

For more details refer:

[Lets Go Nuts! Seven Things To Know](#)

[Five Things You Want To Know About Turmeric](#)

[Three Liver Health Secrets Revealed](#)

---

## Ignore the Sun at your Peril

The sun is critically important for our health. A regular exposure to sunlight is vital.

Here are a few things to know:

- By getting adequate exposure to the sun you can reduce the chance of common cancers by 50%. Reduce chance of heart attack by 50%, and reduce risk of infectious diseases like influenza by 90%. Sun is also vital for bone health. At this point you should be going: Wow! *No other food, medicine, or vitamin can match these benefits!*
- Given all the benefits of sun why do we avoid it? The answer is that we are scared of skin cancer, though amazingly, sensible direct exposure to the sun has *never* been shown to cause skin cancer! (You may be astounded to learn that sensible exposure to sun actually slightly *reduces* chances of skin cancer.)
- Another reason is that most people think that they can substitute Vitamin D for the sun. But again, the benefits of direct exposure to the sun have not been replicated by ingesting Vitamin D.
- Vitamin D is not the only thing produced when our skin is exposed to sunlight. Many phytochemicals and vitamins produced are yet unknown and they all combine together to provide us health benefits. Simply put: There is no substitute for sun!
- We must get direct exposure to sunlight on our skin without intervening glass. Our exposure must be limited to our requirement and we must not overdo it. Overexposure may cause skin cancer for some and there are no benefits to overexposure.
- Exposure time depends on how much skin is exposed, the type of the skin, the latitude where you live, and the time of the day. For example a white person living in New York will need 10-20 minutes of direct afternoon sun. A brown person will need 30-40 minutes. and a black person will need 50-60 minutes of sun. Darker skins need more direct exposure as they block sunlight. (These are times for exposure to full arms and legs in summer).
- If you do not get enough sun the next best option is to get a UV lamp. A typical UV lamp will give you your required exposure in about 5 minutes to be taken every alternate days.

*Key Takeaway: Not getting enough sun may be dangerous for health.*

For more details refer:

[Ten Things To Know About The Sun](#)

---

## Know the Super Villain of Foods

It is hard to attain good health if one is unaware of the “super villain” of foods. This is ordinary sugar. Hundreds of years ago this was a non-issue. But now sugar is cheap and it is everywhere: Bread, dressing, chips, fries, cookies, pizza dough, soup, ketchup, fruit juices, flavored water, and the list goes on. Our consumption of sugar is so outrageous that it has emerged as a super villain threatening our health. Here are the highlights you need to know:

- Sugar in all its forms: Refined, unrefined, brown, jaggery, honey, agave, all should be avoided.
- Substituting sugar with sweeteners is not recommended as these mess up gut bacteria that are vital for our health.
- The bio-availability of added sugar is extremely potent, that is why sugar in fruits and berries is considered okay. Though you do not want to overdo fruits, specially mangoes and grapes.
- Sugar is addictive. Be prepared for “withdrawal symptoms” as you wean away from it.



*Key takeaway: Know that we are consuming way more sugar than our ancestors and at modern day levels sugar is toxic.*

For more details refer:

[Eleven Things To Know About Sugar](#)

[Glucose versus Fructose Five Things To Know](#)

[Is Sugar Toxic?](#)

---

## A Modern Day Super Killer: Stress

It is not controversial to say that stress is the single biggest cause of death in modern times. Underlying most modern ailments is a common source: stress. It is also well accepted that if you cut your levels of stress it will cause you to live longer and happier. Here are a few things to know:

- The stress system is complex and all encompassing. It controls all our internal systems. This is why too much stress puts our internal systems out of whack.
- Too much stress can put on hold routine repairs slowing recovery from injuries. It can change the way our genes are expressed, switching some on and others off. It has direct bearing on the way our body processes energy and has a direct bearing on our weight. Usually making us fat.
- We cannot live without stress and not all stress is bad. But it is the worry and tension type of stress that is the problem when it is unrelenting.
- There is a limit to the amount of “good stress” our system can take. So it is important to take breaks and vacations. Otherwise there is danger of burn out.
- Stress can be addictive, so as we drain it away, our mind-body finds ways to create more. We do this in various ways: by watching stress inducing movies and shows, by getting into unnecessary arguments, by cutting back on sleep, by overworking, and by a million other creative ways!



*Key takeaway: Stress is the biggest roadblock to health.*

For more details refer:

[Six Surprising Facts About Your Ego](#)

[Six Stress Surprises](#)

---

## The Great Stress Antidotes

The good news is that there is a systematic way to prevent stress from ruining our lives. The better news is that when stress level goes down “a fog lifts” and we are able to make better decisions, our creativity improves, we get happier, we sleep better, and our health improves. So what are these great stress antidotes?

- Sleep
- Walking
- Yoga
- Pranayama
- Meditation
- Laughter
- Vacation
- Socializing
- Games and hobbies



*KeyTakeaway: It is possible to counter Stress.*

**Warning:** You must always keep in mind that the PRIMARY purpose of the activities listed here is STRESS REDUCTION. They should not ADD to your existing stress. If they are doing so you must discontinue. Sometimes we change the goal to BURNING CALORIES and we lose the benefits of STRESS REDUCTION. That is a very poor tradeoff.

---

## The Woodcutter

Out in the forest there is a woodcutter. He gets paid by the amount of wood he cuts. The woodcutter wants to spend all his time chopping trees while he is in the forest. Every minute he spends doing anything else reduces his payout. But after a while he realizes that his axe has become blunt and he is not making great progress. The woodcutter then stops to sharpen his axe.

Why does he do this? We know that any time he spends not chopping trees is going to reduce his payout. This is how the woodcutter explains:

“I view the time I spend sharpening my axe as an ‘investment’. It helps me chop more trees in the long run.”

In many ways we are like the woodcutter. Though we all have a million things to do, we have to somehow invest the time in activities that reduce stress. When we do so we find our investment is a wise one. Reduced stress improves our decision making, makes us more creative, and less error-prone. We get much more done as a result. A bigger bonus is that it makes us healthier too.



*Key Takeaway: Don't chop trees with a blunt axe.*

---

## Sleep

Somehow most of us think that we can get by with less sleep. When there is pressure to get a lot done, sleep is something we usually cut back on. But it is less known that getting less sleep on a regular basis can be dangerous for our health. Here are few things to know:

- Sleep is vital for our well-being. We can survive longer without food and water than sleep.
- We should at least get 7-8 hours of sleep. Before the invention of lighting systems humans slept for 10-12 hours.
- Getting less than 6 hours has been shown to reduce life expectancy.
- When we get inadequate sleep our memory suffers, we make more mistakes, our mood is bad, and we feel tired and low energy.
- It is extremely dangerous to drive when sleep deprived. (In such a conditions even a small alcoholic drink can be fatal as it may cause you to nod off quite easily).
- Higher body weight is associated with lack of adequate sleep. The easiest way to lose weight is to sleep more. (Unless you are already sleeping 10 hours per night).
- Sleep is the best antidote for stress. But the inverse is also true- high stress levels prevent us from getting proper sleep. That is why you have to rely on other activities like Yoga to counter stress and get good sleep.
- Getting adequate sunlight during the day and having regular sleeping hours is a key to getting good night's sleep.



*Key Takeaway: Sleep is vital for mental, emotional, and physical health.*

For more details refer:

[Five Ways To Better Sleep](#)

[Seven Sleep Surprises](#)

---

## Walking

People who are inactive and spend most of their waking time seated have reduced life expectancy. When we hear this we are motivated to exercise and we join a gym, or we start speed walking, or jogging. Less than 1% are able to stick with it and we are soon back to our usual routine of spending most of our waking time seated. If we cannot stick with a more rigorous routine, why not do a more enjoyable one that we can stick with? Why not take a leisurely walk everyday? Here are a few things to know:

- Daily leisurely walk is a great thing to add to your routine. It will greatly improve your mood, help you relax, get exposure to the sun, and improve your overall health and wellbeing.
- If you cannot walk outside create a “walking path” indoors in your home.
- Use a pedometer (or other such devices) to keep track of your daily step count. Target 3,000 to 5,000 steps daily.
- To reduce the time you spend seated consider using standing desks and sitting on exercise balls.
- Walking after meals and/or walking the dog are great ways to get your walking quota done.
- Refer to the link below for more tips on increasing your daily step count.



*Key Takeaway: Human health is intimately connected with walking.*

For more details refer:

[Get Moving!](#)

---

## Yoga

Yoga is a remarkable gift that our ancestors have left for us. It is the most potent known tool for stress reduction. It is safe and can be practiced by everyone- young and old. It does not need fancy equipment and can even be done safely at home. Here are a few highlights:

- Besides reducing stress levels, yoga helps stretch hamstrings, improve posture, strengthen the back, improve mood and act as anti-depressant. It helps unblock emotions and gain better control over them. It helps improve flexibility, mobility, and balance. An it improves creativity, improves focus, improves sleep, and helps reduce weight.
- It is important to do yoga safely. Injuries can happen while doing yoga, but when done properly the risk for injury becomes negligible. Supervision by a qualified teacher will help you practice safely.
- There are various styles of yoga. Find one that is suitable for you.
- The main purpose of yoga is to reduce stress. After a yoga class you should feel good and relaxed. If not the style or pace of yoga is not suitable and make changes till you find something that works for you.
- Please refer to the links below for more details.

*Key Takeaway: Yoga is a powerful technology for stress reduction.*

For more details refer:

[Six Ways Yoga Heals](#)

[Is Yoga Safe?](#)

[Eight Ways To Make The Most Of Your Yoga Practice](#)

[How Does Yoga Work?](#)

[Five Golden Rules For Beginners](#)

[Top 10 Excuses For Not Doing Yoga](#)

[Thirteen Tips For Yoga Beginners](#)

---

## Pranayama

Pranayama (or breathing exercise) is an under appreciated tool for opening the doors to good health. You can do it in about 10-15 minutes and yet its impact is quite powerful. Here are a few things to know:

- There are many different breathing exercises associated with Pranayama. The ones referred here slow down, smoothen, deepen, and elongate the breath.
- When our breathing slows down and deepens, it sends a powerful feedback signal to the mind-body: “All is Well!! Relax!” Our stress levels plummet and internal processes that were formerly out of whack come back in balance.
- Since breathing is part of the “Autonomous system” slowing it down sends a powerful signal to all other functions attached to the autonomous system and relaxes them.
- If done wrong, breathing exercises can be extremely harmful. So please be warned: Do these under a direct supervision of a trained teacher. If you breathe deeply but do not slow down your breath there is danger of over-breathing and may lead to an asthma attack.
- These techniques are easy to learn but hard to master. However once you get the hang of it, you can safely practice these on your own and they stay with you for life. Just 10-15 minutes of your time is never going to give you better returns!
- Pranayama and Yoga are a great combo. They reinforce each other and the benefits multiply if both are practiced in combination. Do your Pranayama after your Yoga practice.



*Key Takeaway: Certain breathing exercises can have a powerful positive impact on health.*

For more details refer:

[How Does Pranayama Work?](#)

---

## Meditation

In the last few decades meditation has gone mainstream. This is a good thing, and you too should take advantage of this new technology if not already doing so. Meditation has been thoroughly researched. It has been shown to lower stress levels and to rewire the brain to improve its functioning. There is nothing esoteric or religious about meditation. It can be done by anybody and it can be done anywhere. You can even do it in a noisy stadium full of people! All you need is 10-20 minutes for its powerful impact to show up. Here are a few things to note:

- Most of us have lost control of our thoughts. Consequently these run amuck in our brain in circular loops that give rise to anxiety and worry. Eventually this leads to chronic stress.
- Meditation interrupts the circular loops of thoughts by giving the brain “something to chew on” instead. This is usually a phrase that you repeat over and over again.
- When the cycle of negative thoughts is interrupted, our mind-body relaxes and stress levels plummet.
- The phrase that you chant in your head can be anything but it is best to pick something from your religious tradition or you can pick something neutral such as “Peace” or “Love”.
- Pick a nice quiet spot and sit comfortably. Sit on a chair if sitting cross legged on the floor is uncomfortable. Close your eyes and start repeating your phrase. Do this inside your head without vocalizing or moving your lips. If you notice that you have gone on a tangent and are thinking something else, then just smile and come back to your internal phrase chanting. Do your meditation for at least 10 minutes but for best results do it for 20 minutes.
- Meditation will lower blood pressure, improve mood, improve sleep, reduce stress and anxiety, improve emotional balance, improve focus, and improve creativity. A great return for 10-20 minutes of your time!
- Yoga, Pranayama and Meditation work great in concert. Do Pranayama after Yoga and then follow that up with Meditation for best results.

*Key Takeaway: Meditation is powerful, use it to improve health and focus!*

For more details refer:

[Getting Started With Meditation In Nine Easy Steps](#)

---

## Laughter

There can be nothing easier and more fun to do than to laugh. Yet we seem to lose touch with laughter as we age. Studies have found that children laugh more easily and more frequently than adults. When we laugh we tell our mind-body “It is okay, it is going to be okay”, and our systems relax and de-stress. Here are few things to know:

- There are two types of laughter: One is a more controlled “social form”. The other is a primitive “uncontrolled and involuntary” form of laughter.
- Most of our laughter comes about when we meet people we know and we laugh in its “social form”. This has nothing to do with humor or jokes but more with communicating things like: “I know” or “I understand” or “I am glad to be with you”.
- Laughter is contagious. It is easy to “catch laughter”. Laughter can easily go from its “social form” to the “uncontrolled involuntary” form. When we are with friends and having a good time we can have bouts of good old involuntary uncontrolled laughter.
- Our mind body does not care where the laughter is coming from: Whether it is fake, or social, or involuntary. It immediately de-stresses us.
- Laughter is immensely useful in getting through difficult/stressful situations. If you can laugh together then you are communicating “we can get through this together” and the situation diffuses. Thus laughter can be immensely useful for our success, not just health.
- Laughter yoga relies on the fact that laughter is contagious and fake laughter can easily turn into real laughter. A 10-15 minute session of laughter yoga can lift your mood for the entire day.
- Do not miss watching funny shows and funny movies or a standup comedy show that you like.



*Key Takeaway: Join a Laughter Yoga club and enjoy comedy shows.*

For more details refer:

[The Benefits Of Laughter Yoga](#)

---

## Other Activities

Besides the things we talked about earlier there are many other activities we can do to reduce stress levels. Most of these we already do: like take vacations, socialize, and engage in games or hobbies. But here are a few tips:

- Sometimes we forget that the purpose of a vacation is to maximize relaxation. Instead we turn vacations into a frenzy of activity that increases stress rather than decrease it.
- It is important that everybody involved understands the purpose of a vacation. And you plan accordingly- with an easy laid back schedule and no pressing “100 things to visit” on the agenda.
- When it comes to socializing make sure that these do not degenerate into nasty political affairs. Your social circle should consist of people who support each other and are fun to be with. You want to be with people you trust, who you can share your troubles with, and who you can laugh with.
- Hobbies and games are great as long as you do not turn them into hyper competitive activities that add to your stress levels. The less “judgmental” these activities are the better.
- Hobbies and games can be a great way to connect with people and build lifelong bonds.
- People who are socially connected and have a great support structure with friends and relatives are happier and live longer.



*Key takeaway: Stay connected with friends and family.*

For more details refer:

[The Important Things In Life](#)

---

## Forgiveness

Of all the things listed in this guide nothing is more difficult than forgiveness. Yet it may be the most important. Without forgiveness our lives are like hell. We are angry and bitter, and our thoughts revolve around retribution and vindication. It is as if we are prisoners of the past unable to move forward. Lack of forgiveness can be a huge obstacle to good health. Here are some useful tips:

- The most important thing to know is that forgiveness is NOT about justifying or accepting the actions of your victimizer.
- Forgiveness is done for your own sake. For your own well-being.
- What does forgiveness mean? It means that going forward you will choose not to be consumed by what has happened in the past. Your thoughts will not be about how you will take retribution from your victimizer. You will no longer obsess over how “you will show the true colors of your victimizer to the world”. You will “evict” your victimizer from your mind, not allowing any thoughts related to him or her to surface. If they do, you will gently drive them out, saying to yourself that “you have moved on.”
- Sometimes the person to forgive is yourself. Often we are hardest on ourselves. Forgiving ourselves for our past mistakes is very important. Without it we cannot start our journey to new beginnings.
- Forgiveness is not easy. It does not happen overnight and it does not happen without effort. In the beginning you have to “fake it, till you make it”.
- Yoga and Pranayama are very important as they slowly put you in touch with your emotions. You can then do meditation and gain an awareness of your thoughts. Your journey into forgiveness will slowly unfold and you will have to consciously push yourself to move forward and break free.

*Key Takeaway: Forgive for your own sake.*

For more details refer:

[Five Lessons From Mandela To Us](#)

---

## Meaning & Purpose

Human life is an incredible gift. We make the most of it by taking care of our health. As we have seen in these pages, it is not difficult to be healthy. But the remarkable thing is that as we find health, so also we find meaning and purpose. In fact the two are so intertwined that they seldom exist without each other.

When we are in a mode where love and learning flow freely, we find that we are healthy too. In fact the same obstacles to health are also obstacles to love and learning. When these obstacles are removed our spirit soars freely and express itself through us. No longer captive of the ego, our lives are filled once more with purpose and meaning.



---

## Next Steps

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We hope this will put you on the journey to find health, love, and happiness. Here are some of the next steps you can take:

- To make the most of each section please click on the links offered below “For details refer to” section of the page.
- Please send us your questions, feedback and comments. This will help us improve the next edition of this guide. Write to: [healthguide@mylifeyoga.com](mailto:healthguide@mylifeyoga.com)
- Please send us your testimonial and stories on how this guide helped you. Where suitable we shall weave them into the broad canvas of MyLifeYoga space so that others will benefit from it. Write to: [healthguide@mylifeyoga.com](mailto:healthguide@mylifeyoga.com)
- Please feel free to share this guide by e-mailing it to your friends and relatives. You can post this link on your Facebook, Twitter, and other social media: <http://mylifeyoga.com/2015-health-guide/> (please copy and paste this link)

We have used pictures found in the public domain to illustrate this guide. All such images are the property of the original authors.