

Little Book of Balance: Eating as an Art of Living

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FOREWORD

As someone who won't take nutrition or health advice from random unqualified people on the internet, I don't expect you to do that, either. So, make your own truth out of what you read. I am only here to show you what really helped me find balance as someone who is both passionate about health, nutrition, and about food! It is actually simple, once hardwired into your brain, *to find balance between pleasure and focussing on health.*

As long-time readers may know, the only thing I ever profited off here was my book Crumbs and my little, local catering business, which, due to the ongoing pandemic I was forced to suspend. I take pride in keeping everything ad-free and, in that way, cosy and clean. Catering at the time was the most tangible, real way of connecting with my readers in the neighbourhood, while allowing myself to view my creations in a professional light, conducive to refinement of all the edges of a cake and the clean slice of a brownie. Nevertheless, I cannot imagine continuing to blog as usual without sharing some information that has proved invaluable to my life and lifestyle. Perhaps even more than talking about food and what I may be catering next, this will prove to be both helpful and educational. Although slightly personal, I wish to keep these documents more educational and informative than anything.

INTRODUCTION

I was energetic and flighty as a kid, and naturally quite lean. Later on, surrounded by diet culture in high school, like many other girls I knew, I fell into restrictive tendencies, usually by eating what I love (a lot of sugar!) in carefully portioned, minuscule amounts, and making sure I had loads of vegetables so that I wasn't starving. That may not sound restrictive to some, but there was clearly something a little off there. With help, I reignited my metabolism in my later teens via refeeding, and after persisting for around half a year, I had no real issue with food any longer. I still come back to this refeeding notion anytime I find myself having funny thoughts around food again, even today. Since my main passion is baking, I also held myself to the standard of not letting my hobby be my downfall.

Once I hit my early 20s, despite eating whatever I want, as someone who tends to live life in extremes, I used my hobby as an excuse for my own brand of 'moderation'. *It's ok to have cookies more than half the week for lunch*, I told myself, and I really thought I could get away with it. I started to care less and less about what I put into my body, having junk pretty much every night after dinner, after lunch, and put off exercise, which usually brought me a lot of joy and calm. Naturally, the weight crept on and I had a hard time reconciling my love for food with what seemed like a crazy sugar addiction, constantly demanding excess, excess, excess. Although I was fine with that excess weight and appeared relatively healthy to others, I also knew I wasn't eating well and consequently not feeling my best.

So, I drew up a formula designed to optimise both my mental and physical health and have even shared a few tips with people that also helped them along the way, using science and personal experimentation. After curating them, I thought it would be worth sharing information that is so integral to my lifestyle, how I managed to feel strong and trim again, and how to really enjoy food (including sweets and all the good things in life) without poor digestion and compromised mental health. I do think it becomes harder to find a good balance once you're not a teenager anymore, so this will not be all *eat well and still have dessert and also exercise* because it runs much deeper than just that. Designing these tips also eventually contributed to my decision to pursue a PhD on the relationship between gut and mental health, with the intention of proving just how important what you decide to put into your body, as well as the stress of finding moderation in your own life, is critical to mental wellbeing and functioning at your best.

Note: there are some papers to support tips and my experiments, and the references for the full papers or at least their abstracts (summaries) can be found below.

Disclaimer: I am not a health professional. Nothing here is sponsored and most tips are written based on advice, papers I have read and feedback I have received from people I know personally who have benefitted from them. Any supplements I advocate have been purchased and tried myself.

This brief document will tell you:

- Routines and habits implemented that can help you achieve mental and physical balance
- How I (and you) can eat pastries regularly while maintaining good gut health, a lean physique, and improved physical and mental health
- Unique ways of sustaining this balance

I initially broke the tips into categories such as fitness and nutrition, but to retain even more of a holistic element and show how they all work together, I put them all together.

OK, let's get to it.

1) Combine walking with yoga/strength training.

After stopping competitive sport, I was convinced that HIIT, circuit training and running 10 miles were necessary to keep moderately fit. I now do it much less, and by that, I mean something like a 20-minute HIIT session twice a week maximum. Doing something really intense in the morning feels good, but levels of cortisol, or the stress hormone, are highest in the morning (Adam et al, 2017), and this compounded with the stressful effects of something like a head-banging interval cardio workout further raises them, so you may be burning through glycogen stores, but you are also causing your body to increase its ability to hold on to fat as a defence against stress. Overtraining, combined with potentially a lack of caloric intake to compensate, may also lead to dysregulation of hormones such as leptin, adiponectin and ghrelin, all of which are involved in a complex interaction via the hypothalamus to regulate appetite, further increasing stress in the body (Magherini et al, 2019), and doing more harm than good in the long run. I enjoy intense exercise once in a while, but in my experience, doing it too often, leaves me more tired throughout the rest of the day, and sometimes with an uncontrollable appetite.

Yoga has been a game changer for me and many other people I know, and for good reason. Although this document isn't about weight loss, it is definitely the major thing that helped lean me out, more so than anything else. Stick with it long enough and you will see and feel results. Yoga is a perfect, accessible form of bodyweight, strength and resistance training. It works you physically and mentally, priming your brain to make better decisions during the rest of the day, even if you're not huffing and sweating from a class. More than anything else, it fosters a connection between mind and body, supporting the ethos of this guide— of mindfulness and focus, for the rest of the day. If you wake up feeling lazy and tired, it is so easy to just flop down on a mat at home and ease into a yoga workout. I *always* feel perky and energetic yet calm and focussed at the end of a class. From a mental health point of view, exercise, specifically endurance and strength training like yoga, can increase total antioxidant levels, which is important as oxidative stress is implicated in most psychiatric disorders such as depression and anxiety (Ng et al, 2008). Depending on my mood and energy levels, I switch between advanced classes and softer classes. I usually do almost an hour of yoga or pilates (which combines similar elements but has more of a focus on rehabilitation and strength) every morning, providing a calm focus like nothing else. Try it for 10-15 minutes daily first thing in the morning for a week and see how you feel. If yoga isn't really your thing, incorporating strength training with basic weights or bodyweight exercises regularly is good too, and this should be prioritised over intense cardio.

Walking is another daily habit which is not just great exercise, but keeps the mind fresh and alert, and also serves as a good distraction to negative emotion. Walking at a moderate to brisk pace is conducive to the flow of creative thought, too (Popova, 2021). You get creative freedom and good exercise in less than a half hour. The powerful combination of walking and yoga on most days of the week allows one to achieve a liberating sense of calm, deep focus and creative freedom.

You can function fine while being sedentary, but you will never be working at your optimum.

2) *Eat mindfully.*

Alongside eating at home, this is the single most transformative thing I practice for my health and wellbeing. It's quite common nowadays to override our hunger and satiety signals due to social norms (e.g. our friends are eating so we follow, or there are chips and popcorn at the cinema), so this is one thing you can do to enjoy said foods without going crazy. If you find that you can't actually 'mindfully' eat, that may be because your body is deprived of something and you should allow yourself to just eat, even if not completely mindfully, for that is a simple physiological cue hinting that you don't yet have adequate amount in the system.

At mealtimes, actually sit down, chew your food, and give yourself 10-20 minutes every time you eat, even when you are alone. Do this with all foods, be it chicken and broccoli, or cakes and treats. It takes less than a half hour for your gut to signal to your brain (Holtmann and Talley, 2014) via leptin that no more food is needed to feel satisfied. So even if you eat a slice of cake mindfully, you are way less tempted to eat the rest of the whole cake. With practice and further exposure, your brain will understand that the sugar from a single slice is enough.

3) *Cook at home 80-90% of the time.*

Ask me to do this 3 years ago and I would have laughed in your face. Trust me, I still and always will love restaurants and cafés. I go to a café at least once or twice a week because I like croissants and café culture, sue me. But hear me out. I got away with eating out often in the past, but it did catch up towards the end of my undergraduate days, especially with the mammoth portions and tons of nameless dressings served in England. Most foods cooked outside, even the 'healthy' or vegetarian options, have processed oils added to them which only increase cellular oxidation and thus increase stress and inflammation in the body, all of which lead to negative health and mental health consequences.

If you are used to relying on packaged, convenience foods, try to cook dinners at home for just a week. If you don't know where to start, try meal kits— I am a huge fan of HelloFresh and still use it when alone, as it takes away a lot of decision fatigue regarding what to make, and you still end up with something wholesome and delicious every day without extra waste. The process of cooking fresh, seasonal ingredients is therapeutic and rewarding, tying the end of your day together nicely. And if you hate *that*, find a signature, easy breakfast and lunch/dinner meal that you can prep on Sunday. Roast some vegetables, cook a large pot of rice mixed with beans, and toss them on everything throughout the week. If you can shower and walk to work, you can invest in what you put into your body. The sceptic that I am, I thought meal deliveries might be a waste of money, but I have saved hundreds of dollars and hours of time (no, this is not sponsored by HelloFresh).

4) *Keep apples and bananas visible on the counter.*

Sounds less life-changing than it is. Of course, you can chop up any fruit and put it in the fridge, but apples and bananas are easy to eat, require little peeling and increase satiety levels more than a lot of other fruits, while being jam-packed with nutrients. Reach for one of those if you are hungry between meals.

I once had someone ask if I just constantly snack on my baking projects throughout the week. Trust me, if there were cookies on my counter instead of the apple, I would eat the cookie first. I am merely an animal who, after hours of staring at a screen during a long workday, have no willpower and will grab whatever I see. Therefore, if I have no one to share my brownie experiments with, I eat a small piece and freeze the rest. It is that simple and requires little willpower. Have you tried a frozen brownie? It's edible, but not quite the same as a warm one drenched in melting vanilla ice cream and raspberries on the side. Make these dessert occasions rare, and by doing so, you make them special. Not to mention, it feels so good to find a frozen piece of cake in the freezer two months later. It is like finding an extra five bucks on the ground.

5) *Stop being scared of carbs/processed/bad/sugary foods.*

Processed foods only cropped up in the post-world war decades due to their convenience, shelf life and taste, and stayed for their profitability. Therefore yes, we are not designed to eat them, and we should not be eating them 24/7. But is life the same if you go to Paris and refuse to eat the best croissants in the world? You also don't have to refuse treats during Thanksgiving, or Chinese New Year, or Christmas. The science of willpower is also intriguing, but I can sum it up here: just because you avoid something does not mean you do not think about it. Food addiction is not exactly like alcohol addiction; you can't help an alcoholic recover by putting him in a bar every night, but food is actually something we need to survive, whether we like it or not. So, it all comes down to the way you think, not totally about controlling your environment. It is the mindset that counts, and the mind is the most powerful thing we have. By making it a habit of telling yourself consistently that *you are enough* and combine this with the previous tip on eating mindfully, you can transcend that primal need to finish off the whole pack of chips or 5 chocolate bars. I used to think that I was a complete sugar addict, when really, I just thought I was not sufficient as a person on the inside and needed external stimulation to feel calm and whole again. Therefore, you can achieve a sense of balance even if you have junk food in the house, or if you live in a family that can't go a day without it.

I'll say it again— tell yourself: *I am enough*. If you really can't control yourself around Kettles chips no matter how hard you hide them, then make it a point to either not have them in your line of vision during the day, or if you live alone, set a quota for the week and stick to it. Trust me, sometimes having a 'moderate' or relatively healthy relationship with food can be hardest for people who love it the most, but there *is* a way around it. Perhaps get an ice cream tub to share with your significant other and a packet of crisps for the week. There will come weeks where you may not even want the crisps anymore, and others where you must have the Lindt chocolate bar. Chocolate is something I have every day, but someone else probably does not need it that often.

On the note of carbohydrates... I'm not just saying it because I love breakfast and dessert. Unless you have epileptic seizures or somehow revolutionised your life on the ketogenic diet, which I personally think is unsustainable for anyone unless you have an illness which requires the complete elimination of a food group, then get that sourdough bread which will last you until lunch, packed with B vitamins and fermented goodness. I still eat french toast made with brioche and white bread, because that's the most delicious way to do it, and I will not compromise taste for anything. Get the refined white or brown stuff if you want, but make sure that that is not the one bread you rely on. Having been spoiled in Germany with her bounty of unrefined, delicious, house-made breads, I have witnessed not just how these loaves contributed to the sharpness and efficiency with which a German operates, but also

how the flavour can shine, contributing, not deterring from, one's daily health quota. To be able to delegate with oneself smartly in the kitchen is a hallmark characteristic of those who have defined visions. You may crave the whole loaf of bread, but knowing how sick you may feel afterwards, and how it will erode your energy for the rest of the day, will be enough to deter you from doing just that.

Bread is a processed food, but good bread is simply one of the most delicious foods in the world that can also be incredibly nutritious. The combination of carbohydrate with fat and protein is more satiating than any other permutation of that trio, especially considering protein is the most satiating macronutrient (Brennan et al, 2012), which will provide a good amount of energy without crashes during the day.

6) Intermittent fasting is not THE answer.

There are two sides to every coin. If you are a woman, intermittent fasting, or IF as it is fondly known, may increase your stress levels in a way similar to my earlier note on overtraining, and can also contribute to a dysregulation in reproductive hormones. I am a proponent of fasting when done correctly, as it has been shown in many clinical trials to provide a whole host of health benefits such as increased focus and concentration, but when it comes down to purely weight loss on a long-term basis, there are no significant clinical trials which show that intermittent fasting is more beneficial (Stockman et al, 2018). It is true that intermittent fasting can reduce oxidative stress which causes inflammation in the body, and inflammation is the root of many physical and mental diseases. However, if you leave it until you're very hungry, you also may be more prone to eating things which are highly processed or high in saturated fat, which themselves increase oxidative stress anyway.

Eating within a certain time period should not be the excuse to be more careless about what you put into your body. You will not get fat eating breakfast, but you can increase your body mass if you consistently eat crap first thing in the morning, or if you start to binge on literally everything when it comes time to eat during your eating window. If you have a history of disordered eating, you need to make it more a priority to stabilise your hormones and blood sugar levels, something you will not achieve with fasting. If these levels are not balanced, after long periods of fasting, your body is already in a stressed, fight-or-flight mode, and is more likely to hold on to every calorie as fat instead of revving up your metabolism to burn things off. By eating at (more or less) regular intervals and not constantly snacking, you still have good concentration and a revved-up metabolism, compared to if you try and starve yourself for most of the day.

7) Don't throw away your broccoli stems, eat seaweed, and consider taking certain supplements.

I love broccoli even more now that I know just how beneficial it is for the gut. Broccoli, particularly their stems, is full of sulforaphane, which is one of the most important and well-researched plant chemicals to date, known for reducing inflammation in the body (Yagishita et al., 2019). Eat more of it, at least a few times a week. More than other vegetables, broccoli stems are so underrated, and even when combined with other proteins and carbohydrate, it never makes me feel too sluggish or bloated. As for seaweed, it contains zinc, which is really good for regulating appetite, so consume more things like seaweed. It's also really good at increasing levels of BDNF which is a chemical that reduces

depressive symptoms (Solati et al., 2014). I eat the roasted stuff at least a couple of times a week as a delicious, healthy snack.

Are you sometimes bloated, fatigued, constantly hungry and irritated, but you eat fine and sleep ok? It may be time to look into experimenting with supplements and figuring out the root of your problem. A lot of people for example, have a thyroid issue which messes with your appetite and other hormones. Personally, I do not suffer any major health issues, but I do have problems sometimes with sleep and am simply more anal about getting my greens in, so I do sometimes take a green juice (the one I take is stated below in the next tip) and magnesium and B12, since I do not eat meat. The juice also contains certain adaptogens that really help me manage my levels of alertness and cravings even when I do overindulge in sweet foods anyway. I will not tout the benefits of any specific supplement because that's not what this guide is about- each of our internal systems are like unique fingerprints and I believe you need to try out different things and see what works for you, if it even works at all. There is a dearth of literature on what specific formulas of plant medicines or adaptogens one should take, so I will not tell you to buy this one thing. But hear me out, some really and truly have helped me attain some clarity of mind, more energy, and have the potential to lower visceral fat, too, especially since I have tried a fair few. I think the most important things to eat and to try are broccoli, apples and fermented foods. When looking for a supplement, look for transparent labelling and do your research before buying anything. Cool new adaptogens getting coverage in the market nowadays are gymnema leaf extract (appetite control) and rhodiola rosea (counteract stress), so do not be afraid of those if you do see them on a bottle.

What about other supplements like omega-3? Honestly, there is more *convincing* literature on probiotics, fermented food and fruit or vegetables than that for omega-3, even though there is more literature overall on omega-3's (I put a paper at the very end on this, in the 'extra reads' section). That being said, omega 3 fatty acids do enhance overall brain health. So, go ahead and eat your omega 3's too, typically found in fatty fish like cod or salmon, and olive oil, but definitely limit the omega-6 foods found in vegetable oils like sunflower or canola oil, and I don't really think it's necessary to take omega 3 in a pill if you do consume fish. As for the oils, many people think these are unproblematic, but heating them up in a pan and consuming them regularly is harmful to your cells and may trigger inflammation in the body. Studies on this are limited but it's better to be on the safer side. To put things simply, you're better off eating and cooking with butter and olive oil than margarine and sunflower oil.

Humans and every other animal on this planet are designed to handle very high levels of stress, but I have definitely seen a significant boost in my mood and gastrointestinal health after taking certain supplements. Mind you, I am not religious about supplements, and do go for long periods not taking anything or drinking any special green juice, such as on holiday, or maybe I forgot to re-purchase something, or life simply got in the way. Such a habit is preferable, but need not be a religion.

8) *Eat fermented foods.*

I am very passionate about gut health, which affects the way your brain functions, how you think, how efficiently you absorb nutrients, and how well you can fight off pathogens. Almost 80% of your immune system is lying within your gut. Apple cider vinegar, kefir, sauerkraut, plant-based yoghurts and even sourdough bread are powerful sources of prebiotics (whole foods such as apples, which feed your gut), and probiotics (the bacteria which live in your gut). These foods were all tested in

randomised controlled trials or RCTs (at least 1 for each of the aforementioned foods) for their benefits, and RCTs are the golden standard of scientific experimentation by reducing certain sources of biases. There is ample evidence showing just how beneficial these foods are for one's gastrointestinal health (Dimidi et al, 2019). Here is my personal gut health routine that ticks all the boxes:

GUT HEALTH ROUTINE:

Daily: First thing in the morning, I mix a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar into a large glass of water. This regulates blood sugar levels and curbs my occasional morning sugar craving. It also has a surprisingly large antioxidant and anti-obesogenic profile (Bouderbala et al., 2015). Then, either before or after lunch a few times a week, I drink SuperGreen Tonik. Move aside, Athletic Greens. A game-changer. I *hated* all green powders and am very sceptical about what's on the market nowadays. But this a very transparently labelled green juice containing 39 vitamins and essential nutrients, including B12 for focus, magnesium for hormonal balance and energy, ashwagandha for hormonal balance and stress relief, and spirulina, the nutritional powerhouse which alone is also a potent source of B vitamins. Not to mention it actually tastes pleasant, like minty vanilla. Once again, no, this is not sponsored.

I try and get both fermented and fibrous foods in around 2-3 times a week minimum. By fibrous I mean cruciferous, fermented vegetables such as sauerkraut and kimchi, not generic fermented foods such as cheese, pickles and wine.

I drink a Yakult a few times a week, which is full of good probiotic strains that nourish the gut. If I don't have that around then I make sure to consume yoghurt (I personally like coconut yoghurt) on weekdays instead, and also consume seaweed 2-3 times a week.

And that's it! None of you should follow this to a tee, I am just showing what really boosts my gut health and primes my physical and mental state. I actually really enjoy it, too. Health should never be suffering! With this routine in place, I let myself enjoy basically everything, except meat because I'm 90% vegetarian, though that's just a more ethical and environmental decision more than anything.

9) *Have a life purpose*

Whether you are in the food/ health sciences industry or not, if you're thinking about the way you look or what you have to eat next *all the time*, then ask yourself 2 things: firstly, *am I getting enough food?* If you aren't, then the normal physiological response is clear. Eat 3 meals a day, preferably all with a mix of carbohydrate and protein, and ignore what I said about mindful eating, because this is one exception where you can be a little mindless, until you get to a healthy mindset where you're not even thinking about food obsessively.

Secondly, ask yourself, *is my life boring?* Are you actually doing something that excites you, something you care about? It doesn't even have to be active. How do you know you hate knitting or sewing your own clothes if you never tried it before? Maybe you are actually a great computer game designer, but you don't know it because you're watching other people on YouTube play these games while you moan about how many bags of chips you just ate. You are probably not doing something in your life

that's engaging your brain in a good way, so your priorities are skewed to the point where food takes up the most space in your brain, or you don't care at all. So, figure out that amazing life purpose, whatever it is, and however small. Think about what you enjoyed doing as a kid, such as drawing, reading, or climbing trees. Dedicate a significant portion of your life to enriching yourself with these activities and these thoughts, and then during pockets of the day you can really choose and enjoy foods you enjoy eating, and eat them mindfully.

10) Quality sleep is everything.

I dabbled in sleep methods throughout my teens. Apart from seeing how long I could go in the night without falling into a deep sleep, my favourite experiment was with bimodal sleeping, which was the supposedly the usual sleep pattern of our ancestors until blue light stole away our ability to naturally fall asleep. You essentially go to sleep early (say around 9pm), then wake up for a couple of hours or so at 2 or 3 am, stay awake to read or learn and then go back to sleep for a few more hours. Back in the day you would read by candlelight or maybe have sex or something. There may be a scientific basis to this method, since memory consolidation has shown to be increased if you, say, read something just before falling asleep, therefore this power is doubled if you fall asleep twice in the night. Bimodal sleep is fun because you can do something creative or fun while the rest of the world sleeps, and whatever I do read during that short time frame, I remember especially well the next day and the many days after. That aside, the most important thing is to get enough, at least 6-9 hours every night, although there are a few who can function on 4-5 hours (Walker, 2017). If you dabble in bimodal sleep, I can almost guarantee that when you fall asleep the second time, it will be deep and dreamy. Of course, don't do this if you have insomnia or have trouble falling asleep in the first place.

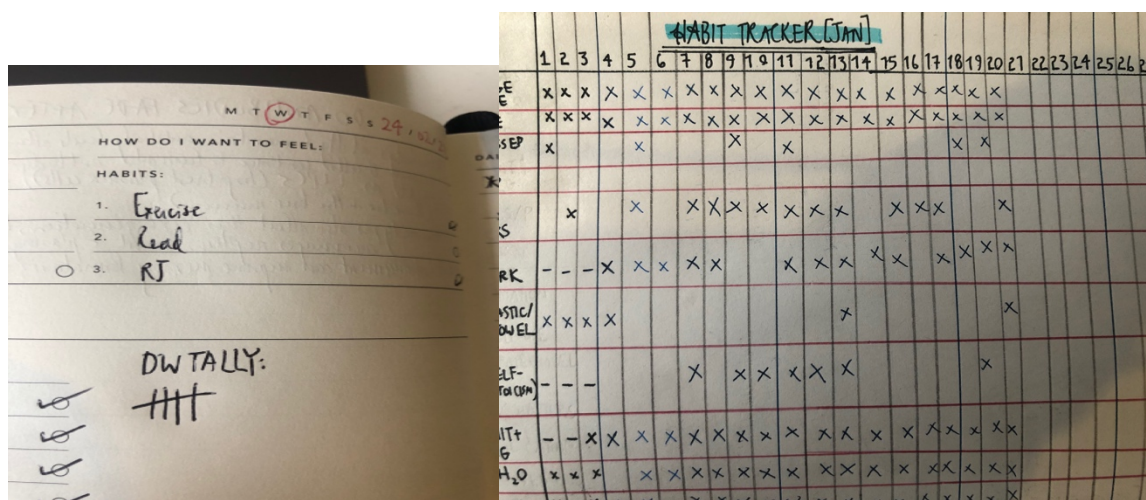
Sleep helps consolidate memory, focusses your thoughts and reduces the stress hormone cortisol, aka the number one culprit for making us stress-crazed, unthinking, overeating and overdrinking monsters. In a recent (confidential so I won't have the reference attached) seminar I attended at the University of Oxford, where I work, I also learnt about how quality sleep drastically reduces negative thinking, which is crucial to feel motivated and feel like you have a purpose in your life, every day. You will have more energy, and then crave sleep by the end of the night. I do not really do bimodal sleep anymore, but I do wake up pretty early when it's still dark, just to tinker about and do/watch/read something. Lack of sleep is one thing many of us can fix. I struggle with this myself too sometimes, so I force myself to do small things most days of the week, like not have coffee or alcohol in the late afternoon. The latter stimulants, as much as I enjoy them, alter the quality of your deep sleep, critical for all the benefits of sleep such as memory consolidation and even skin regeneration.

CONCLUSIVELY... AND WHAT NOW?

In the summary below, reading everything in a list makes the points themselves appear so simple, almost like common sense. That is true for some of the points, but sometimes the simplest ones are hardest to implement, because we think it will become second nature for us. What will work is application, and practice. Food and health aside, think about any habits that help or hinder you. Is it drinking too much? Is it feeling obliged to see people who you don't feel connected to anymore? Is it a really bad relationship with a parent?

If you take care of yourself with these or other tips you find helpful, you gain a stunning clarity on your life priorities, and you are in control what will really elevate you and what you take pride in in your life. Look, I am still young and naive and have a lot to learn myself. That said, I have seriously experienced a massive difference not only in my relationship with food with these simple pointers, but also in my relationships with people, and the way I treat and carry myself. And if that's the only thing I am good at knowing, then let it be (ha).

This guide is less overwhelming than it all may appear to be, for the aforementioned tips are easy, and mostly free, to incorporate into one's daily lifestyle. If you find it hard to remember them, write them down somewhere, or keep a habit tracker to track simple daily habits like eating fruit and vegetables. It doesn't even have to be that many. Below are (from my personal notebooks) two examples side by side of you can go about doing this, but you can do this online or however which way you prefer. I used to overdo the metrics, and now it's just making sure I do 3 simple things daily.



Make your life fun, make it yours. Create your balance.

And most importantly, don't be afraid to question everything.

In summary:

- **Combine walking with yoga or another type of strength training**
- **Eat mindfully!**
- **Cook at home, eat out less**
- **Keep apples and bananas in your line of vision, or on the kitchen counter**
- **Do not be scared of any food, be it carbohydrates and processed foods**
- **Have a life purpose**
- **Eat fermented foods**
- **Consider supplements, eat broccoli and seaweed**
- **Eat regularly, do not rely on fasting**
- **Get quality sleep**

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Extra website and journal reads:

Background information of the gut-brain axis and the relationship between this and depression. It also explains how the two are connected, if you're interested in the science behind it too: <https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/revneuro/29/6/article-p629.xml>
Scientists usually measure blood markers and MRI for brain imaging to see if there's a relationship between something you eat and changes that they may induce in the blood or brain.

The gut-brain-depression 'trialogue' is nicely explained here while stressing the role of inflammation in depression: https://journals.lww.com/co-psychiatry/Abstract/2017/09000/Depressed_gut_The_microbiota_diet_inflammation.9.aspx

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/obr.12603>

Exercise and mental health:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0163834317301159?via%3Dihub>

Limited evidence for omega-3's: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10408398.2013.876959>