

5 Simple Steps for Balanced Healthy Living

Disclaimer and Copyright Information

The contents of this book are for informational purposes only and are not to be taken as medical advice. I am not a doctor or healthcare professional, and any information given is my own opinion based on my research and experiences. Please consult your physician or healthcare professional on any matters concerning your health.

This book may contain links to information, products, or services by third parties. The contents of such third party sites contain the opinions of their individual owners, and I do not assume responsibility for any third party information or opinions. By linking to such third party sites, I am simply expression my own personal recommendations and opinions of these sites.

These statements have not been evaluated by the Food & Drug Administration. Any information in this guide is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. No part of this publication shall be reproduced, transmitted, or sold in whole or in part in any form, without the prior written consent of the author.

Copyright © Lori Elliott 2016. All rights reserved.

Cover Image Copyright © [konradbak]/Depositphotos.com

Day One: Reducing Stress and Creating Balance

I decided to put this as the first of the five steps, because for many of us, trying to live a healthier lifestyle ends up being very stressful and far from balanced.

Whether you're just beginning to make some changes to your lifestyle, or whether you've been living a healthy lifestyle for awhile now, trying to be healthier can become a source of stress for all of us.

Maybe you're feeling overwhelmed and confused by the amount of information and conflicting opinions you hear, or maybe you've reached a point where it seems like worrying about the food you eat and trying to avoid the chemicals you might be exposed to is controlling your life. Or maybe you want to be healthier, but you just don't even know where to start.

Over the next few days, our goal will be to keep things as simple as we can and to focus on the basic aspects of healthy living that will help us to stay in balance with as little stress as possible.

Watch Out for Extremes

When you're trying to live healthier, it can be pretty easy to fall into trap of being almost obsessive about it.

When I first started trying to be healthier, I went about it in a pretty extreme, unbalanced way. I went from eating nothing but junk food, barely exercising at all, and using all kinds of chemical-filled products to only eating 100% organic and natural foods, almost religiously exercising, and using only products that were completely natural and homemade.

None of these things were bad things in themselves, of course. Organic food, exercise, and homemade natural products are all good parts of a healthy lifestyle. It was the unbalanced way I was doing these things that was the problem.

I was starting to feel like eating one cookie made with white flour and white sugar was going to ruin my health forever (and that's only a slight exaggeration!). I felt like I *had* to exercise (to make up for the cookie that I just ate), and on top of all that, I had to replace all my products with homemade versions to make sure I avoided every single possible exposure to any potentially harmful chemicals.

It was stressful to say the least!

Balance Is More Important

It's true that it's very important to be aware of what we eat and what sort of chemicals we might be exposed to in our environment. The quality of our food matters. Getting enough sleep and exercise matters, too, and the products we use on a daily basis, and all of the other elements of living a more natural lifestyle.

All of these things matter, and if we eat nothing but fast food and sit on the couch all day and skimp on sleep, the chances are we won't feel nearly as healthy and as happy as we could be. But eating an overly restrictive diet, obsessively exercising, and worrying about every little thing that might not be completely natural isn't a healthy way to live either.

The key is balance. If we're stressed about trying to eat the perfect diet and everything else that falls under the category of healthy living, then all of that stress is going to end up doing more to harm our health than any unnatural ingredient could do.

Simple Steps to Take:

- If you're new to the world of healthy living and feeling a bit overwhelmed by everything, take the journey one small step at a time. Spend several weeks or even months making small changes, and try to focus on just one

change at a time. Living a healthier lifestyle doesn't have to be an all or nothing thing, and you can take all the time you need.

- If you've been trying to live a healthier lifestyle for awhile now and you've fallen out of balance, then one of the most helpful things is to take a step back and take a break from trying so hard to be healthy. Eat a cupcake or a slice of pizza. Skip a day at the gym and take a nap instead. Wear a little bit of the perfume with the scent you love but have been too afraid to use because of the unnatural ingredients. This is much easier said than done, I know, and you wouldn't want to do these things on a regular basis, of course, but there's freedom in being able to give yourself little breaks from the perfectionism that often goes along with trying to live a healthy lifestyle.

Further Reading:

[7 Signs Your Healthy Lifestyle Needs More Balance](#)

[Is Your Healthy Lifestyle Ruining Your Metabolism? 7 Signs You're Making This Common Mistake](#)

[Why Listening to Your Body is Important for Your Health](#)

[The Common Health Mistake You're Probably Making](#)

Day Two: Eat Real Foods

Food is a pretty big topic to discuss, and it's one that seems simple at first but that can get incredibly complicated the more you read about it.

If you've done much of any reading online or in books about what constitutes a healthy diet, you'll find an overwhelming amount of information, and to make things even more confusing, a lot of that information will contradict something else you've read before. You read all of the praise about certain "superfoods" and rush to add those foods to your diets and then you read other information saying that those same exact foods could be ruining your health.

There are so many different diets out there and so many different foods to choose from that sometimes it's easy to feel like you don't even know what to eat at all anymore!

There's really no such thing as a "one size fits all" healthy diet, though, and the ideal diet looks different for everyone. At Our Heritage of Health, the focus is on eating natural, real foods - whatever that means for you. Whether you're paleo or vegetarian or whatever your personal food preferences might be, you can eat a healthier diet by focusing on eating foods that are *real*.

What Are Real Foods?

Real foods are foods that are natural without artificial flavors or preservatives or other additives. Real foods are organic or are grown with the least amount of chemicals possible. Animal products like meat, cheese, milk, eggs, and butter are sourced from farms where animals are humanely raised and have plenty of room to roam on fresh pasture outdoors.

Real foods are the old-fashioned, simple foods that were the staples of our grandparents' and great-grandparents' diets.

How to Identify Real Food

There's so much that we could talk about when it comes to the topic of real food, but for today we're going to try to stick to the basics of what a real food diet looks like. This diet will look slightly different for everyone, depending on what foods you like to eat, what foods are easily available to you, etc.

Is It Simple and Natural?

In general, whole foods are the most likely to be simple and natural. Foods in their whole form, straight from the garden or farm (like fruits and vegetables) are simple, one ingredient foods without any artificial ingredients.

If a food comes in a box or a can or a package with a list of ingredients, though, you might have to look a little bit more closely to see how "real" the food really is. A glance at the ingredients list can usually give you a good idea. If you can recognize most of the ingredients, and if they sound like ingredients you already have in your kitchen, then there's a good chance it falls into the category of being a real food.

If there's a long list of ingredients that you can't even pronounce, though, or if you see the words "artificially flavored" anywhere then it's probably not a very natural food.

Organic and non-gmo foods are the best option if you are able to get them, but if you can't, then buying simple whole foods is still a much healthier option than buying TV dinners or fast food. Cooking your own meals with simple ingredients like fresh produce, even if it's not organic, is still more natural than buying packaged meals.

Is It Minimally Processed?

Not all processing is bad. Tomatoes are cooked to make sauce. Wheat berries are ground to make flour, etc. These are simple forms of processing that you could do in your own kitchen, though, if you had the time and the right equipment.

Other foods are processed to the point that they are denatured and hardly even have any nutritional value left to them. This is why you'll see vitamins and minerals added to many packaged foods. These foods were processed to the point that they had to add synthetic vitamins back in to replace the naturally-occurring vitamins that were lost during processing.

When you're at the grocery store, you can ask yourself, is this something that I could potentially make myself if I wanted to, or is this something that can only be made in a big industrial processing plant?

Where to Find Real Foods

More and more grocery stores are beginning to sell natural and organic foods, so you can often find some good options in your regular grocery store. Natural food stores or specialty food stores can sometimes have a wider range of options, but they may be a bit more expensive.

One of the best ways to find good-quality produce and animal products is to go to a local farmer's market or farm stand. These local sources of real food are often a great way to get food that's grown organically but at a lower cost than what you might find in a health foods store.

Another good option if you like gardening is to try growing some of your own food. This allows you to know exactly how your food is grown and gives you complete control over the quality. (If you're interested in learning more about how to grow your own food, I have some gardening information and tips on my [Gardening page.](#))

I've also put together a [Resources Page](#) with some of my favorite sources of real food and healthy living basics.

The 80/20 Rule

In the natural health world, we often try to follow something called the 80/20 rule. This means that you focus on making about 80% of the food you eat natural, organic, “real” foods, and the other 20% you don’t worry about as much.

The 20% might be getting pizza or ordering a dessert at a restaurant or anything else that you might not consider a part of your regular healthy diet. (This doesn’t apply to any food allergies you might have, though. Of course you’ll want to continue avoiding those foods.) The 20% is meant to help you to relax a little about food and not stress about whether each ingredient is healthy enough or natural enough.

When I first starting trying to eat healthier, my diet was more like a 99/1 ratio. I was overly restrictive about what I ate, and I felt like I was ruining my health if I ate any “bad” foods. And I can tell you that that’s not a fun (or a healthy) way to live!

The 80/20 rule is designed to help you to have a healthy balance in your diet. You want the majority of the food you eat to be healthy food that will nourish your body, but you also want to be able to relax a little and enjoy a few “guilty pleasures” too.

Simple Steps:

Take a look at the foods you eat on a regular basis. Are they “real” foods? Or do you eat a lot of TV dinners and fast food? Pick one change to start working on. If you eat a lot of fast food, try setting aside one night a week to cook a homemade meal. (And while you’re at it, you can double the recipe to have enough for leftovers for another time, too.)

If you cook a lot of your own meals but you use a lot of packaged convenience foods in your cooking, check the ingredients list for one of those foods, and if it doesn’t seem like a natural food, try replacing it with a more natural option.

If you’ve been eating healthier food for awhile now and you find yourself getting a little bit too restrictive with what you eat or constantly worrying about the

ingredients in your foods, make sure you're allowing enough room in your diet for the 20% "cheat" foods. I know this isn't always easy to do, but it can help to make healthy eating a lot less stressful.

Further Reading:

[How to Switch to a Real Food Diet Without Feeling Overwhelmed](#)

[How to Cook from Scratch \(Without Spending All Day in the Kitchen!\)](#)

[Tips for Saving Money on Real Food](#)

[Counting Nutrients, Not Calories \(Why Calorie Counting Doesn't Work\)](#)

Day Three: Prioritize Sleep and Rest

Sleep is one of those things that we all know we need, but it's also one of the first things we sacrifice when we're short on time.

It's easy for us to convince ourselves that we don't really need more sleep and that we'll be fine if we stay up a little bit later to watch TV or get up earlier to finish a project. And, in today's workaholic society, we can even find ourselves feeling guilty for "wasting time" sleeping or being "lazy" and resting when we're tired.

I don't know how many times I've tried to convince myself that I'll be able to get more done if I just skimp on sleep a little bit, but it never ends up working out that way in the end. For one thing, being sleep-deprived never usually ends up allowing us to accomplish much of anything anyways. We're able to focus so much better and be so much more productive when we've had a good night's rest.

But, even more importantly, the time when we're sleeping is the time when our bodies are able to accomplish the most when it comes to our health.

Sleep Is Our Bodies' Most Productive Time

The time when we're sleeping is the time when our bodies are hard at work, accomplishing more during that period of rest than they're able to do during the day. When we're resting, our bodies are able to focus on restoration and healing.

Getting enough sleep can help our bodies to detoxify, strengthen our immune systems, improve our memories, balance hormones, reduce stress, increase our metabolism, and so much more. We don't have to feel guilty about "wasting time" by going to bed early because our bodies are accomplishing so much for us while we rest!

Putting a Priority on Sleep

I know that getting enough sleep can be hard for many people. Some people have crazy schedules or insomnia or young children who aren't sleeping through the night, etc. If that's you, then please try not to stress about the amount of sleep you're getting. If you have a situation that makes it hard for you to get as much sleep as you would like, then just do the best you can. (And you can check out the tips below to help make the sleep you do get a little bit more restful.)

For those of us who have no excuse for not sleeping, though, (watching TV and Facebook and Pinterest scrolling don't count!) we need to try to put a priority on making sure we get the sleep we need.

I know how incredibly tempting it can be to stay up later to read "just one more page," or to mindlessly scroll through my Pinterest feed or watch a movie. And I've tried convincing myself many times that staying up later will allow me to get more things done, even though it always ends up backfiring later.

Whether you tend to stay up late because you're doing something fun or whether it's because you feel like you're wasting time by sleeping instead of working, today's simple step is to give yourself permission to get as much rest as your body needs. And, whenever you're tempted to stay up later than you should, remind yourself of all of the good things your body can do for your health if you give it the time it needs to rest.

A Few Simple Tips to Help You Sleep Better

- Make sure your room is as dark as possible (Get dark curtains to block light from streetlamps, cover your alarm clock if the glow is too bright, etc.)
- Keep your room at a cool but still comfortable temperature.
- Try to avoid using your phone, tablet, or computer close to bedtime or install a free app like [f.lux](#) to allow the light of your screen to adapt to the time of day.
- Try to devote the last hour before bedtime to quiet, relaxing activities that will help you to unwind and settle down.

- Create a consistent getting ready for bed routine to help your body to get the signal that it's time to get ready for sleep.

Simple Steps to Take:

- Try going to bed 10 minutes earlier than usual. Once you've gotten used to that, try increasing it to 15, 20, or even 30 minutes earlier than usual until you're able to wake up feeling well rested.
- Set an alarm for an hour before you want to turn off your light, and when that alarm goes off, make that your dedicated "unwind and get ready for bed" time to help you keep from staying up later than you should.

Further Reading:

- [The Health Benefits of Sleep](#)
- [How to Get Better Sleep Naturally](#)

Step Four: Staying Active, Not Exhausted

When you think of trying to be healthier, one of the first things that usually comes to mind is forcing yourself to go to the gym and exercise until you're exhausted and then feeling really guilty if you decide to skip a day.

Some people really love exercising and don't have a problem with this aspect of healthy living. But . . . for the rest of us, trying to be more active can be a bit of a struggle to say the least.

We all know that exercise is important for better health and that having a sedentary lifestyle is bad for our health. Knowing and doing are two different things, though! I know how easy it is to fall into the habit of spending all day sitting in front of a computer at work and then crashing on the couch to watch TV or read a book.

Like we just talked about, making time to relax is definitely a vital part of living a healthy, balanced lifestyle, and sometimes spending some restful time on the couch might be just what we need. But we also need to make sure we're balancing that relaxing, sedentary time with enough activity, too.

In earlier centuries, our ancestors didn't have to worry so much about getting enough activity in their day. The majority of them got plenty of activity and "exercise" just with the daily acts of cooking, cleaning, household chores, gardening, taking care of animals, etc. And those who were farmers or who worked in a trade that involved a lot of physical labor got even more activity in their day.

For those of us in the modern era, though, we have to work a little bit harder to get the level of activity that our bodies need to stay healthy. Unless you have a physical job or unless you like to do household chores the old-fashioned way

without modern conveniences, you'll probably want to think about dedicating a little bit of time each day to keeping your body fit and active.

And staying active doesn't mean you have to kill yourself spending hours at the gym doing high intensity exercise. One of the biggest things that keeps people from getting the exercise they need is the misconception that exercise has to involve jogging for miles or lifting weights at the gym. It **can** mean those things if those are activities that you enjoy doing, but, if you're like me and the word "exercise" gives you nightmares of high school gym class, then focus on adding movement and activity to your day instead.

Exercise doesn't have to be really strenuous, high intensity movement to be beneficial. The best way to become more active is to find things that you love doing that involve moving your body in some way. Whether you like playing sports, hiking, jogging, dancing, swimming, biking, doing yoga, walking, etc. the ideal exercise routine for you would include activities that suit your individual body type, personality, and interests.

My personal favorites are taking my dog for a walk through the woods and doing yoga. You'll probably never see me jogging or going to the gym, and if I tried to force myself to do those things, it would probably last for a couple of weeks at most (probably more like a couple of days. . .). Walking and yoga, though, are activities that I actually enjoy doing and that I would want to do even if I wasn't trying to get more exercise.

When you do activities that you love, exercising becomes a much more sustainable part of your healthy lifestyle rather than something you're trying to force yourself to do. Exercise shouldn't be something that you hate or something that leaves you feeling guilty for not pushing yourself to do more. Exercise is about keeping your body healthy and staying active and enjoying yourself at the same time.

Simple Steps to Take:

- If you don't tend to exercise much, think of one activity you really enjoy doing that involves moving your body and being active. Start by doing that activity for at least 20 minutes on one day a week. Then, the next week try doing it for two days in the week, and then three days, etc. until you eventually get in a routine of doing some form of exercise five days a week.
- If you have the opposite problem and you're an over-achiever when it comes to exercise, then try taking a day or two off from your normal exercise routine to try a more relaxing form of exercise like walking out in nature or anything you enjoy that doesn't involve keeping track of calories burned or pushing yourself to the point of exhaustion. The goal is balance!

Day Five: Wellness for the Whole Person

When we think of a healthy lifestyle, we usually tend to think of things like diet and exercise or sleeping more or reducing stress, but there are so many other factors that are important for our overall health, too.

The holistic health model looks at the health of the whole person - body, mind, and spirit - and considers how those three aspects work together. When we view our bodies in a holistic sense, we look at the connections between the body, mind, and spirit as well as the effect that one part of the body can have on all of the other parts.

This is why I like to write about a variety of different topics because, when it comes to our health and well-being, everything matters. Natural health isn't just about what we eat or how much we exercise. It's about everything that has an impact on our daily lives.

Today we're going to cover just a few of the areas of natural living that aren't usually as commonly mentioned as diet and exercise. There's a lot that we could say about each of these categories, but for right now we're just going to focus on becoming a little bit more aware of how these things might be affecting us.

1) Home Environment and Organization

Our home environments are an area of natural living that we sometimes forget about, but they can have a big impact on our health.

One way that we can help make our home environments healthier is to improve the indoor air quality by avoiding the chemicals in products like air fresheners and scented candles and by adding plants to help purify the air.

Another important part of our home environments is keeping our homes organized and clutter-free. Even though clutter might not seem to have as much of an effect on our health as the ingredients in the foods we eat, for example, being surrounded by clutter can be a subtle, almost unconscious source of stress.

Having too much clutter makes you feel like you're living in chaos. And the visual effect of having too many things cluttering up your environment can make your mind feel scattered and frazzled, too. I always notice a sense of relief and relaxation when I finally clean up my clutter and start feeling more organized again.

And another important part of staying organized is time management and avoiding procrastination. I've always been a terrible procrastinator, and I'm well aware of the stress that can come from putting things off until later. Becoming more aware of my tendency to procrastinate (and to create clutter) has allowed me to make progress towards overcoming those stress-creating habits.

Further Reading:

[Four Frugal Ways to Improve Indoor Air Quality](#)

[How Cleaning Up the Clutter Can Improve Your Health](#)

[One Simple Tip to Break the Procrastination Habit](#)

2) Personal Care and Household Products

Most of us use several different personal care and other household products every day (shampoo, conditioner, body wash, face wash, shaving cream, moisturizer, toothpaste, deodorant, perfume, hand soap, air fresheners, etc.) And when you think about the fact that each of these products often has a dozen or more ingredients, it's quite possible that we're being exposed to hundreds of different ingredients every single day.

Because these products are things many of us use so often, it makes sense that we would want to make sure that these products are as natural as possible and don't contain any harmful chemicals.

I know it can seem a little bit overwhelming to think about replacing all of your products with more natural ones, so this is a transition that you can do as gradually as you need to. When your shampoo runs out, for example, rather than buying the same brand you were using, you can try a more natural version instead.

And Instead of trying to avoid every chemical ingredient in your personal care products, just focus on staying away from the worst ones. Some of the ingredients you want to try to avoid are:

- parabens
- phthalates
- triclosan
- “fragrance” (“fragrance” can mean any number of unknown chemicals, and it's best to choose fragrance-free products when possible.)

A good free resource for finding out how safe your products are is the Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep Database. ([You can find it here.](#))

Another option is to try making some of your own products because that way you can know exactly what ingredients are in them. DIY projects aren't for everyone, but if you don't mind spending a little bit of time in the kitchen, they might be a good option for you.

Here are a couple of DIY recipes that I enjoy making:

- [Homemade Citrus Lavender Perfume](#)
- [Victorian Homemade Tinted Lip Balm](#)
- [Whipped Coconut and Tamanu Oil Body Butter](#)
- [DIY Energizing Citrus Room Spray](#)

You can also find lots more DIY recipe ideas on my [Natural Beauty Pinterest page](#) and on my [Cleaning Naturally Pinterest page](#).

3) Understanding Yourself

Another aspect of holistic health involves understanding yourself and learning more about your own individual personality and tendencies. When you're able to know more about who you are (and, more importantly, accept who you are as a person), you are better able to make choices that will be the right fit for you.

The important of understanding yourself is the reason why I've written several times on my blog about the Dressing Your Truth program because I learned so much more than just how to put together an outfit that suits me. As I talk about more in my post about [How Your Clothing Affects Your Health](#), doing this program helped me to learn more about myself and to work with my natural tendencies rather than trying to force myself to be someone that I'm not.

Another helpful part of understanding yourself can be learning the differences between being an extrovert and being an introvert. Learning that I am an introvert, for example, has helped me to realize my need for more downtime and a quieter, slower-paced schedule, and to accept both the strengths and challenges of having an introverted nature.

Further Reading:

[Does Your Clothing Reflect Who You Truly Are? Why Dressing Your Truth Matters](#)

[Are You An Introvert or an Extrovert? And Why It Matters for Your Health](#)

4) Feeding Your Mind and Spirit

The last aspect of healthy living that we're going to talk about today is the importance of feeding your mind and spirit.

One way that we can do this is by learning new things and keeping our minds active. This could be by reading a new book, researching a topic you're interested in, traveling to a new place, or learning how to do a new hobby.

It's also important to set aside some time for rest and doing things that you enjoy. There are so many activities that could fit into this category, depending on your individual personality and interests, but here are just a couple of ideas: take a nap, read a good book, watch a favorite movie, listen to music, go for a walk, have a relaxing bath, have a cup of tea or coffee and a favorite dessert, etc.

And, lastly, remember to practice joy and gratitude. Even if your day is really busy, try to take just a moment to notice a beautiful sunset or to appreciate the flowers you see on your commute to work. Take a minute or two to think of all of the things that you can be thankful for and appreciate all of the blessings that you have.

Simple Step to Take:

Today's simple step is to start developing an awareness of some of these other areas of natural living that we talked about today. Can you see any ways that these things might be having an effect on your overall health and lifestyle? Is there anything you've noticed that you would like to change? And, remember, any changes you want to make don't have to be done overnight! Just make one small change at a time, and soon enough all of those little changes will add up to a much healthier lifestyle.

Final Thoughts:

We've made it to the end of this 5-day course, and I hope that you've been able to start making some positive changes towards achieving more balance in your healthy lifestyle! Living healthy is a journey, and I look forward to continuing this journey with you in the weeks to come!