

RECOVER STRONGER



**6 STEPS TO
BUILDING YOUR
(HEALTHIER, FITTER, WISER)
NEW NORMAL**



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YOU'RE STRESSED, BUT READY TO GET UNSTUCK. HERE'S HOW THIS GUIDE WILL HELP

Many of us started the pandemic with good intentions: “I’m going to use this time to focus on my health.”

Three weeks later, you’re eating raw cookie dough with your hands.

(No judgment. Drawing from personal experience, here.)

Turns out, **ongoing uncertainty, a bleak vision of the future, and endless hours stuck on your couch isn’t very inspiring.**

After two years of this, the general zeitgeist is “fed up.” And frankly, most of us are aching to move on, start again, and feel better.

If you’re reading this, you survived.

That alone deserves recognition.

Whatever methods you used to get here, *you made it*, you scrappy, gritty, resilient human being, you.

And we want to help you feel better: A little **healthier, fitter, wiser, and more capable.** And less stressed.

Although most of the advice around stress management tells you to simply “reduce stress,” we want to offer a different approach.

(Especially because sometimes it’s not *possible* to simply “reduce stress.” Homeschooling for two years, anybody?)

Our perspective?

You can embrace, manage, and even grow from stress.

In this free guide, which is packed with insights from the top experts behind [PN's Level 1 Sleep, Stress Management, and Recovery Certification](#), we'll take you on a little trip:

We'll help you surf the stress in your life with more ease, and we'll take some baby steps toward goals you've put off while in "survival mode."

Whether related to **fitness, healthy eating, mental wellbeing, education, or just rebuilding your social life**, this guide will give you strategies you can apply to any goal.

As you go through these pages, try practicing a "beginner's mind."

- Treat everything as fresh and new; **pretend you don't know anything**
- **Relinquish any "shoulds" or expectations** that you ought to be better, different, or faster
- **Welcome mistakes and stumbles** as opportunities to learn and grow

You can't do this "wrong," and you can't "fail." This isn't another program to start and then quit and then feel bad about yourself.

If you just read this intro, we've planted some seeds.

Change is happening.

Let's go.





STEP 1 **KNOW HOW YOU FEEL, TO FEEL BETTER**

First of all:

How ARE you?

This isn't just mundane small talk.

We care about how you're doing, and it's good for you to know too.

Research shows that when you can express your feelings in simple terms (“I’m feeling sad” or “I’m feeling frustrated”) **negative emotions feel less intense, and you feel more capable dealing with them.**

This reduces your perception of stress.

That’s why we start with such a simple—but insightful, if answered honestly—question like, “How are you?”

But don’t just answer reflexively with a clipped, “I’m fine.”

Really check in with yourself.

To do this, use a simple technique called “notice and name.”

Here’s how to do it:

First, you notice.

Simply notice, without judgment, your thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

You might even try a quick **mind-body scan** (full description at the end of this section) to get a full sense of your current state.

Then, you name.

Maybe you can easily put words to how you feel. Great!

But if you have trouble, use the feelings wheel that follows to help yourself narrow down the specific emotion.

Remember: **Describing your emotions can help you better understand and manage them.**

Start at the center of the wheel with whatever general feeling you perceive, and work outwards until you nail down the particular emotion.

THE MIND-BODY SCAN

Here's how to do it:

1. FIND A QUIET PLACE WITH MINIMAL DISTRACTIONS.

Sit or lie down. Set a timer for 5 minutes, or even 2-3 minutes if you like.

2. NOTICE PHYSICAL SENSATIONS.

Start at the top of your head, and slowly “scan” your awareness down to your toes. Observe (without judgment) temperature, tension or relaxation, itchiness or restlessness, and any other sensations.

3. NOTICE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

Like you did with your body, do the same thing and “scan” your emotions and thoughts.

Ask yourself:

“What am I feeling, emotionally?”

“What am I thinking?”

Again, don't judge or try to make sense of it. Just observe.



STEP 2 FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN TRULY CONTROL

Ok, so now you know how you're feeling. (More or less.)

Probably, if someone asked you *why* you were feeling this way, you could point to a number of things going on in your life right now.

"My kids are home sick and I'm trying to finish a work presentation due today."

"My [parents / neighbors / in-laws / friends] don't share my views on vaccinations."

"My hot flashes have been waking me up at night and I'm exhausted."

There's so much we can't control.

Sometimes, that feels really scary, sad, or enraging.

Certainly stressful.

As a result, there's a natural instinct to *control harder*—to waste precious energy trying to control the uncontrollable.

If your kids are home sick, there's not much you can do about that. (Poor little monkeys.) Your work deadline isn't going away either. So, you have to employ the TV to parent your children (again) as you finish your work assignment.

All of this is mostly out of your hands.

Focus on what you can control.

You could call yourself a bad parent... or, you could recognize that, just like so many other parents in your shoes, you're just trying to make it through a tough day, and you're doing the best you can.

It's not the best day ever, but at least **you've taken charge of the tiny sliver of your life where you DO have control, and used it to help yourself feel better.**

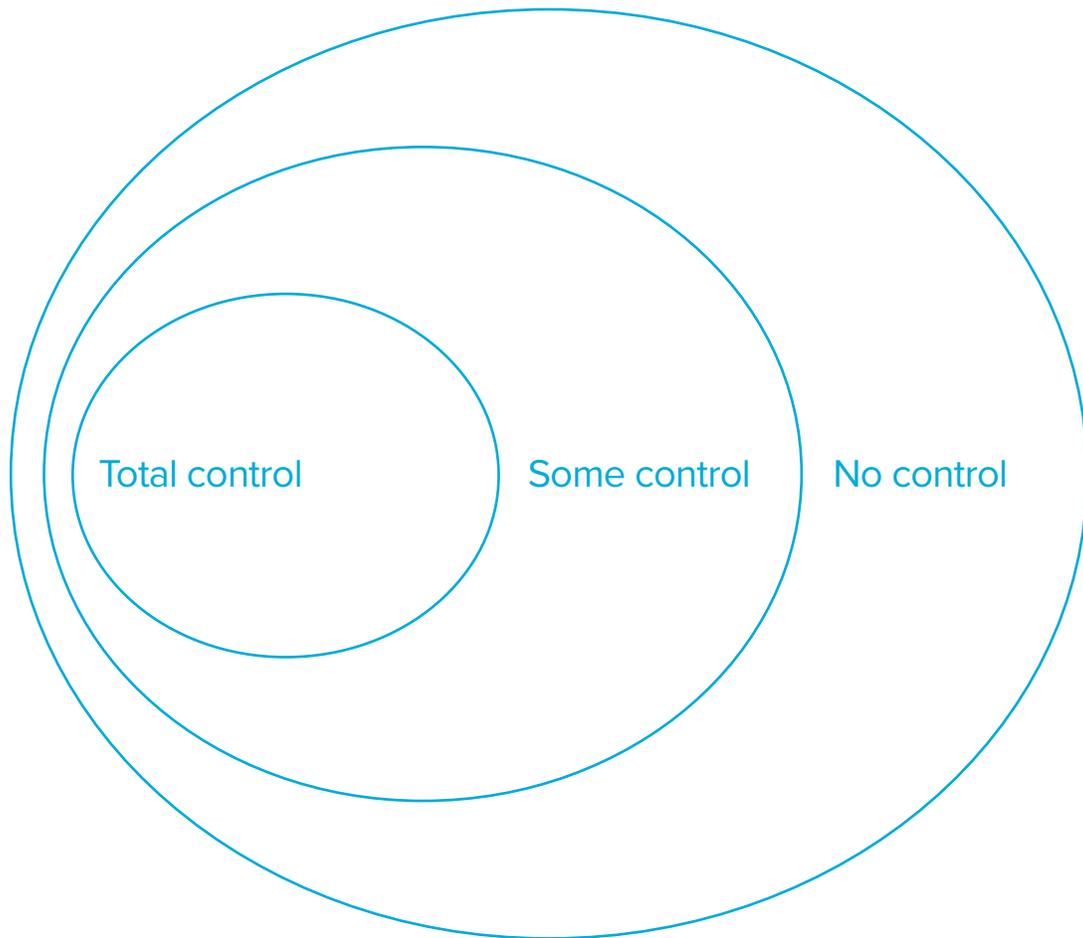
(Plus, you've reserved some brain juice for that presentation you're working on.)

What do YOU have control over in your life?

When we identify the areas we truly have power over and focus more on them, we not only feel less overwhelmed and stressed, but also more effective, capable, and in control.

Use the following image to identify the areas of your life where you have total, some, and no control.





Here's how to do it:

1. Fill in the above circles.

Be specific.

- **What in your life do you have total control over?** (Your actions, your mindset)
- **What do you have some control over?** (Your schedule, your home and work environment, your social support system)
- **What do you have no control over?** (Your genes, other people's thoughts and actions, the pandemic)

2. Review the diagram. Test your evidence for each one.

For example:

- Are you absolutely sure you have zero control over certain things? How do you know for sure?
- Are you absolutely sure you have total control over certain things? How do you know for sure? Make sure each item holds up under critical scrutiny.

3. Decide how to take action.

Based on what you've discovered from the above exercise, choose where you'd like to direct your energy, and what you might decide to let go of.

- **Highlight the items under “total control.”** Start there. You're the boss of those things. For the next few weeks, focus on making deliberate choices that reflect this. Control what you can actually control.
- **Think about the items under “some control.”** What could bring them into the “total control” sphere? What pushes them out into the “no control” sphere? Are these things under your control, but only under certain conditions? What are those conditions? Do you need to control these? For now, just think about them.
- **Let go of the items under “no control.”** Respond as best as you can to these things, using whatever behaviors and other factors you can control. Release your grasp on things you can't control; spending time on these things is usually a waste of energy better spent in other domains.



STEP 3 **IGNITE POSITIVE MOMENTUM— IN 5 MINUTES**

When your life takes a detour and your health habits get derailed, it can feel pretty demoralizing.

Maybe right before the pandemic hit, you'd finally found a routine that worked—doing your meal prep when the kids were at soccer practice, or a type of exercise that really spoke to you. (And then all that went bust.)

Or maybe you've always struggled to fit in regular self-care, and the added obstacles brought forth with the pandemic made that juggling act feel, well, impossible.

If you're looking at your current habits and thinking, "I wish I could do better, but life feels so nuts right now," we've got a gentle, effective way to get you back into it.

The 5-minute action

The 5-minute action is a simple action you can take right now to ignite some forward motion.

There's nothing special about 5 minutes. It could be 10 seconds, or 1 minute, or 10 minutes. The point is:

- It's an action—something you do.
- That action is very small, something that feels easy and simple.
- It moves you in the direction you want to go.

When it seems like you've fallen into a hole and there's SO MUCH TO DO, the 5-minute action can help you feel less overwhelmed, and more empowered to do something good for yourself.

Here's how to do it:

One option is to pick *any* action that might have a positive impact on your health and wellbeing right now.

For example, you might:

- Make your bed.
- Send a text message to someone.
- Slowly enjoy a mug of tea.
- Cut up some carrots for a later snack.

The other option is to get a little more strategic, and pick an action—maybe even one you're ready to commit to daily—to support a larger goal.

Engineer in reverse

To do that, first think of the outcome you want, then work backwards.

For example, maybe your ultimate goal is to get back into the habit of eating mostly home-cooked meals.

Take ONE small action in support of your bigger, future goal.

That might mean making a grocery list, looking up some recipes, or chopping up a few vegetables.

Sometimes it's tough to get motivated, but we'll share a secret with you:

It's *action* that drives motivation, not the other way around.

When you do a small thing to improve your circumstances, you'll find that this actually inspires you to do *more* things. This is how you build positive momentum.

It might not seem like 5 minutes of action will do anything—and maybe it won't do much right away.

However, **small actions add up.**

More importantly, **consistent action will contribute to a feeling of confidence and self-efficacy**, and that will create a virtuous cycle that builds on itself over time.





STEP 4 SCALE SELF-CARE TO FIT YOUR LIFE

“I’ll start eating better and exercising when life goes back to normal.”

Anyone caught themselves saying that?

Except... what even IS normal now?

And even if things go back to “normal” (whatever that means), was “normal” truly that much easier?

Truth is, life doesn’t usually cooperate with your grandest health and fitness goals.

Family members get sick, work gets busy, the roof leaks, the cat throws up in your running shoes...

Meanwhile, you get stuck in an endless cycle:

Giving health and fitness your all when life is going smoothly, then giving up when there’s something standing in the way of exercising, eating well, or heading to bed at a reasonable hour.

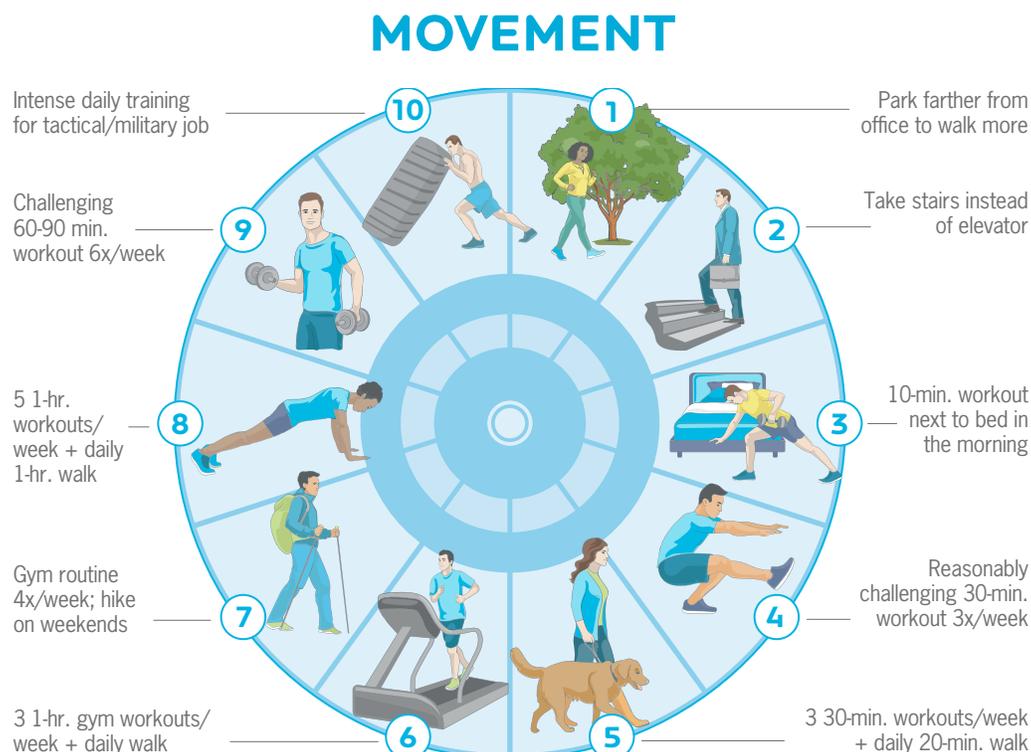
With an all-or-nothing approach, we never really get anywhere.

Here, we'll share a way to scale your health habits up or down based on what's going on in your life so you can make progress—even during the nuttiest, most-pandemic-y days, weeks, and months.

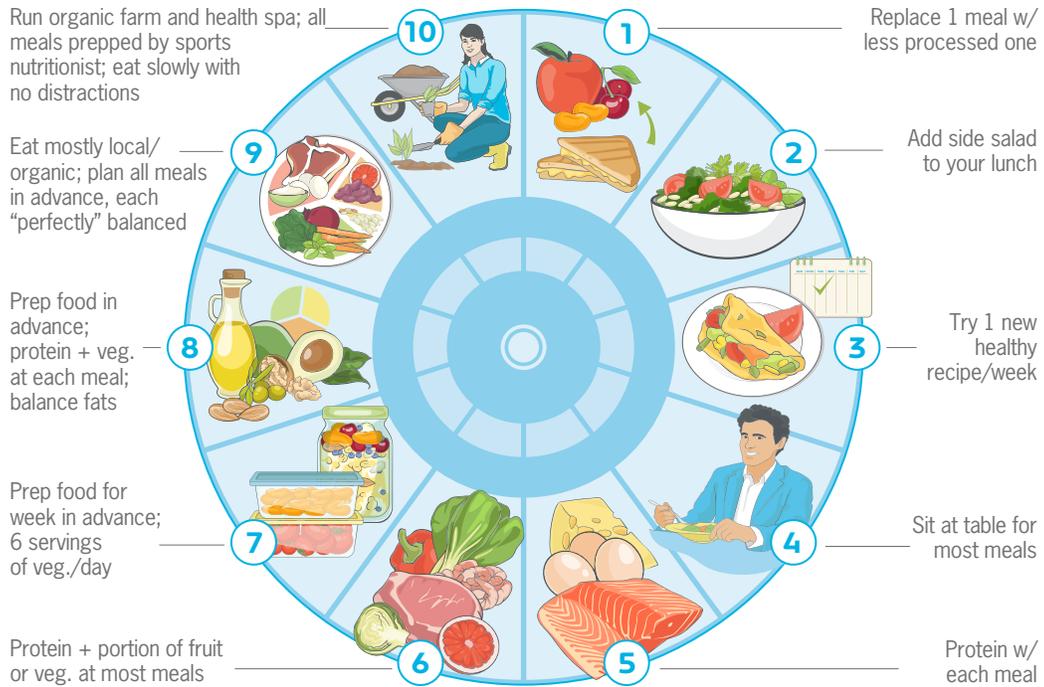
Instead of “all or nothing,” this method helps you strive for “always something.”

6 WAYS TO ADJUST YOUR “LIFE DIAL” TO KEEP MAKING PROGRESS.

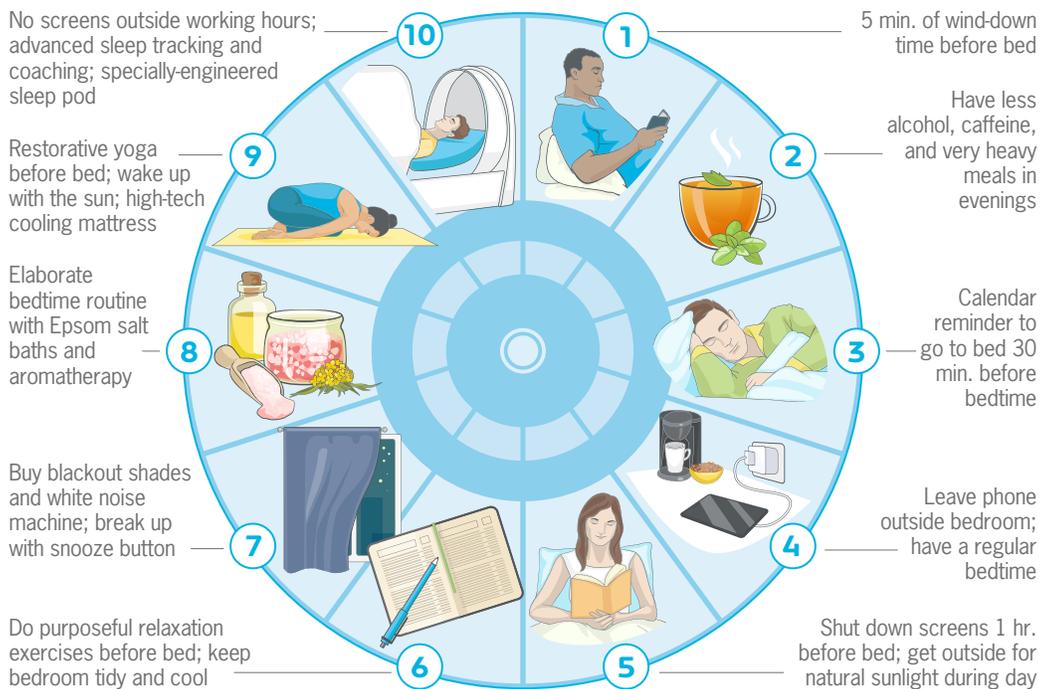
Nix the play/pause buttons, and instead think of your health habits as having volume knobs. Turn them up or down depending on what you're ready, willing, and able to do today.



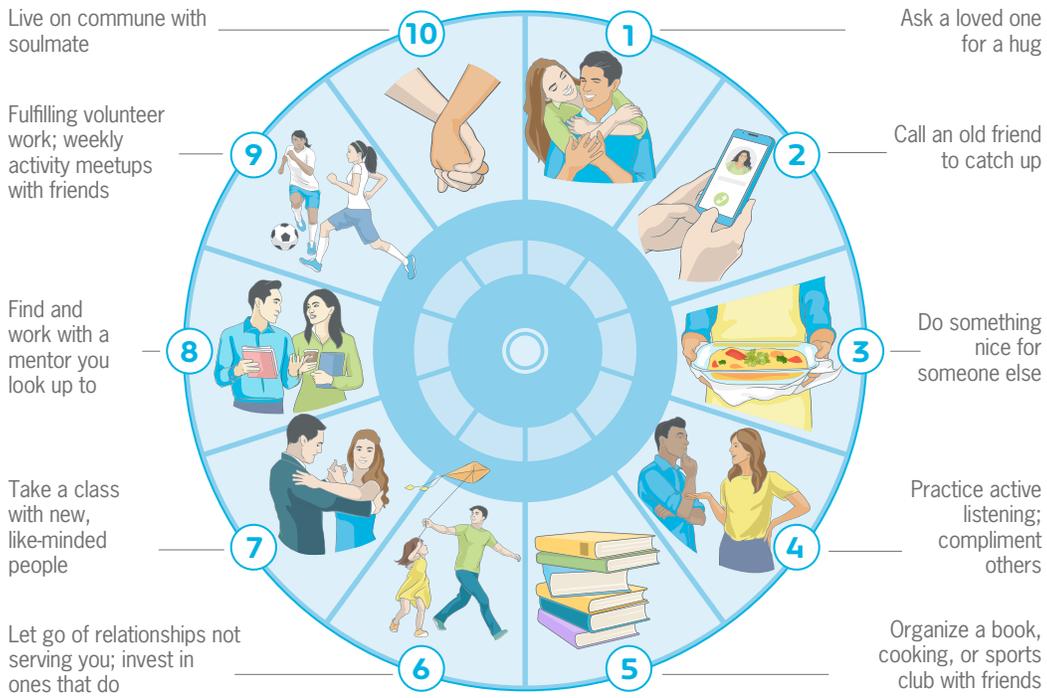
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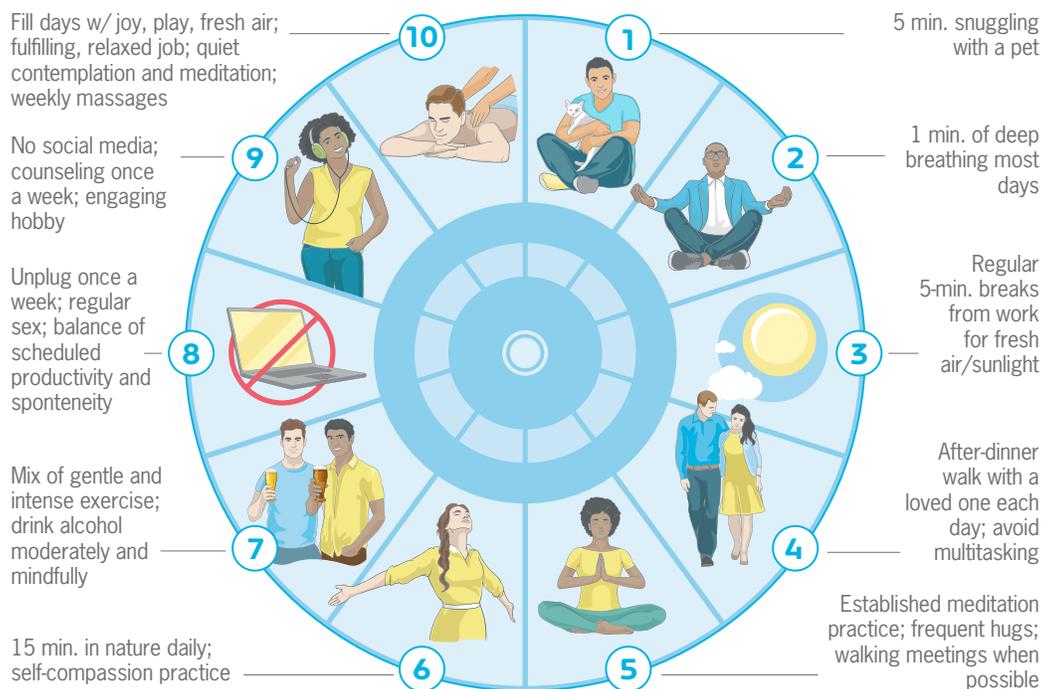
SLEEP



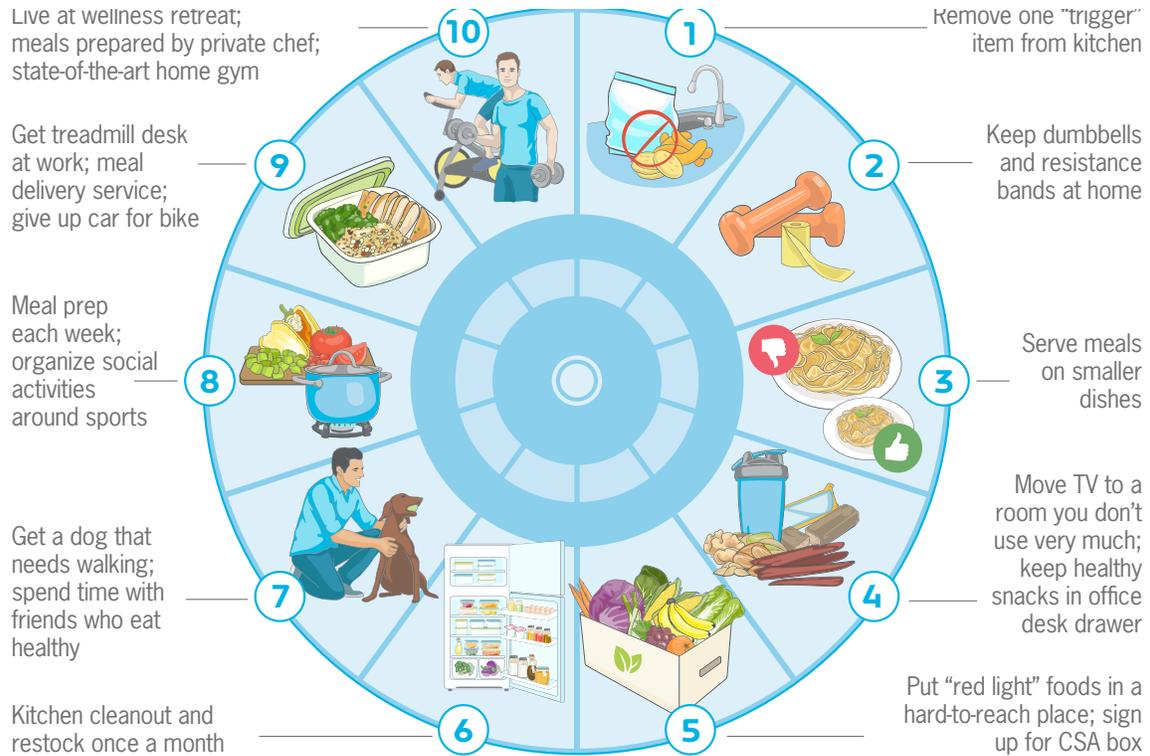
SOCIAL



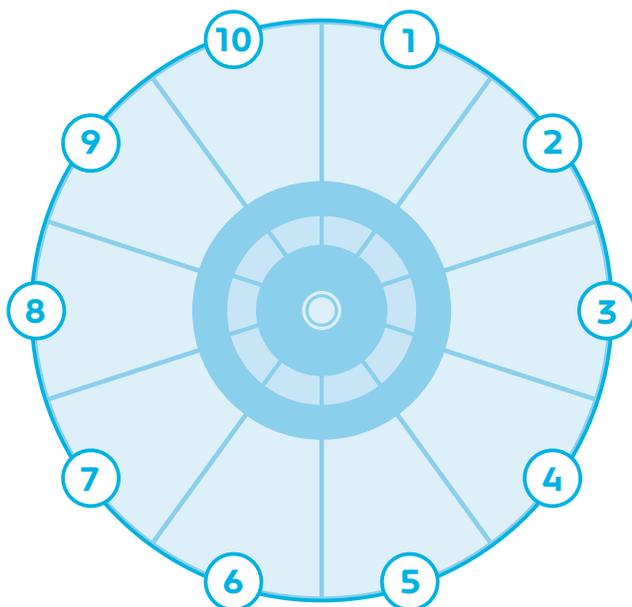
STRESS



ENVIRONMENT



TRY IT OUT FOR YOURSELF



Step 1: Consider areas of life where you'd like to change or improve.

Step 2: Ask, "What's the absolute MOST I could do?" That's your 10.

Step 3: Ask, "What's the absolute LEAST?" There's your 1.

Step 4: Use 1 and 10 to fill in the other points on the dial.

Step 5: Refer to your dial when life gets busy (or slows down).



STEP 5 BUILD RESILIENCE WITH SELF-COMPASSION

If you've "fallen off the wagon" since the pandemic, you might've encountered more frequent bouts of negative self-talk:

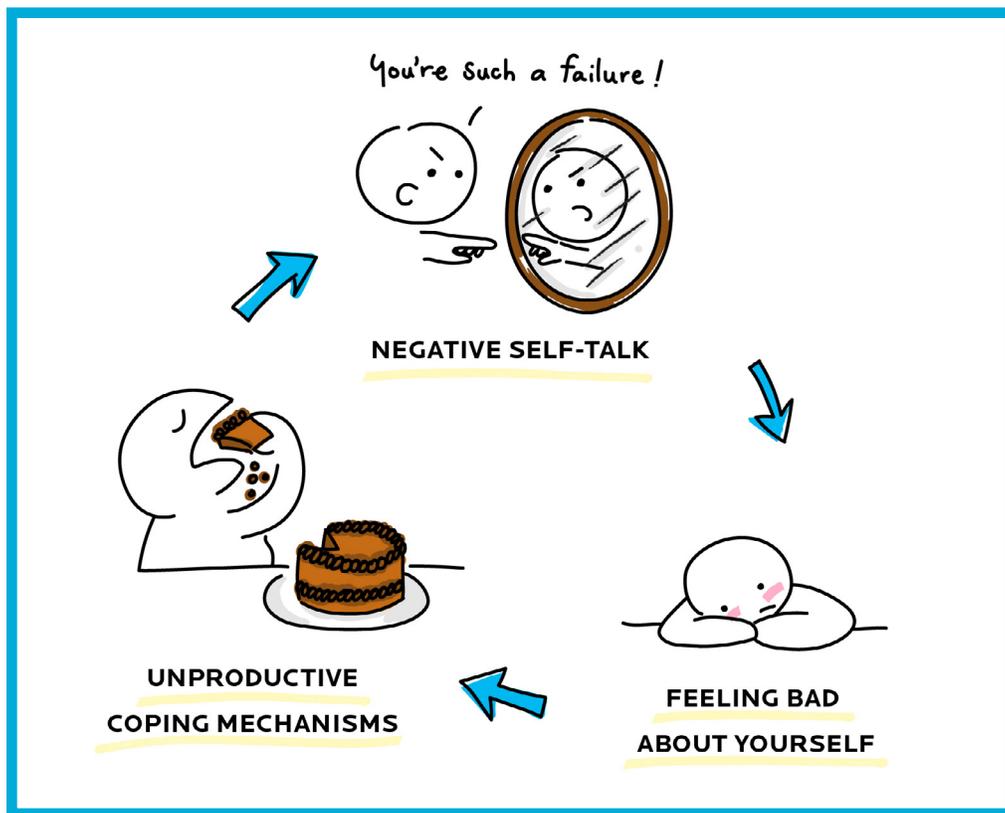
"I guess I'm going to skip my workout, like I always do. I'm such a slob."

"I'm such an idiot for getting wrapped up in this whole vaccination debate with my cousin right before bed. And now I can't sleep. What's wrong with me?!"

"Ugh, I just had to finish the ice cream, didn't I? Nice work, me."

But here's something interesting:

Negative self-talk signals your brain to release dopamine, which is involved in habit formation and addictive behaviors. As a result, **the cycle of negative self-talk, stress eating, and feeling bad about it can become a never-ending loop.**

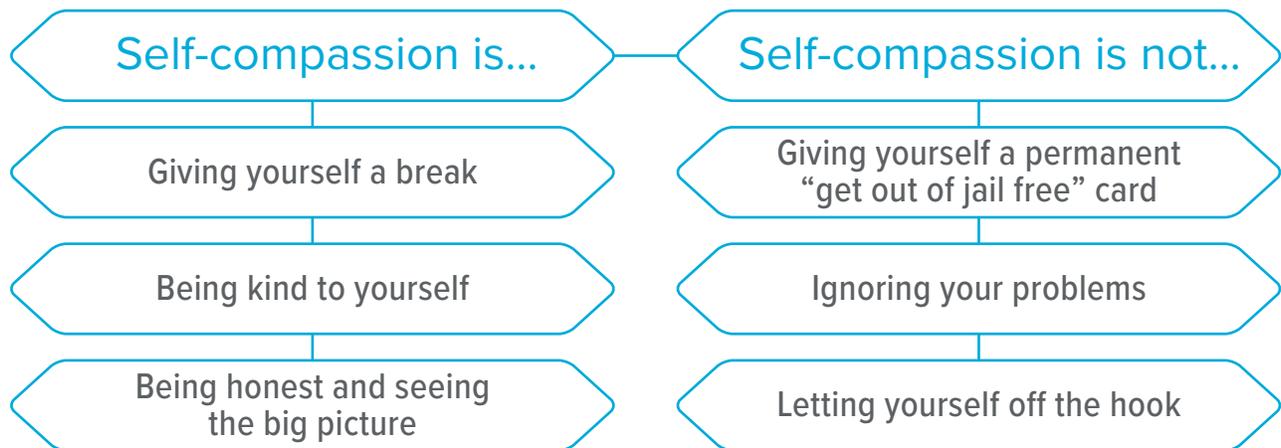


Self-compassion can help interrupt that cycle.

Research shows that people who are honest, kind, and sympathetic toward themselves:

- are more resilient and able to bounce back faster from setbacks
- feel less depressed and/or anxious
- learn, grow, and develop more effectively
- are psychologically healthier overall

Importantly, self-compassion doesn't mean giving yourself a free pass to do whatever you want and become a poster child for hedonism.



What does self-compassion look like in practice?

When you catch yourself beating yourself up for some undesired habit you've fallen into, interrupt the cycle with self-compassion.

Here are the three components of self-compassion, and what they might look like in real life:

MINDFULNESS

You're aware of what you're doing, thinking, feeling and experiencing—without judging yourself for it:

"I'm so anxious from being cooped up in my house right now. And those chips are really calling my name..."

COMMON HUMANITY

Acknowledging that you're not alone, that everyone struggles at some point, and that suffering can actually help us connect and relate to others better:

“I bet there are so many people going through the same thing right now. Definitely empathize with them.”

SELF-KINDNESS

Being generous, caring, and decent to yourself—in thought and action:

“Okay buddy, take a deep breath. You’re going to get through this. I’m going to put on my coziest sweater and make myself some tea.”

Self-compassion isn’t an excuse to continually practice habits that don’t serve your health. Rather, its purpose is to **help remove the counterproductive judgment, shame, and name-calling we often layer overtop of our suffering.**

Because when things are hard, you don’t need a bully.

You need a supportive teammate to reassure you, encourage you, and get you back in the game.





STEP 6

PRIORITIZE PLEASURE AND BEING PRESENT

A thriving life isn't just about damage control or averting catastrophe.

It's about joy, connection, adventure, and pleasure.

Maybe things we haven't experienced enough of in recent years.

So, as you reclaim your life and your health, think about the things that light you up, and try to add them back in—slowly, as appropriate.

What feels good?

When you think of pleasure, you might think of eating a giant tower of ice cream, drizzled with hot, gooey caramel syrup.

And yes, there's no doubt: Eating delicious things *is* pleasurable.

But **pleasure can take many forms.**

Done in the right way, pleasure is often a sensual experience. (Cool it, Kenny G—we're talking "sensual" as in "involving the senses.")

When we *mindfully, intentionally* engage our senses—sight, touch, smell, sound, taste—it helps us get out of our heads, and into our bodies.

This feels good.

It relieves stress, too.

Look for ways to add mindful pleasure to your life.

Pleasure can be big and transcendent, like when you go for a walk in nature, take big gulps of fresh air, and look at the sky and think about the awesomeness of the universe.

Or, it can be small, like zeroing in on the flavors and textures of a single square of chocolate, or the sight and feel of the soft, shiny fur on your dog's ear.

Make a list of things that give you pleasure.

(Bonus: Post the list somewhere visible to remind yourself to prioritize these actions regularly.)

Some examples:

- Wrapping yourself up in your favorite blanket
- Fancy teas
- Talking to that friend who always makes you laugh
- The smell of the trees on that walking trail near your house
- Hot showers
- Wearing your lucky college football t-shirt

Some of these things may seem trivial, but when you incorporate them regularly, it's a small way to add joy and comfort—and to show yourself that you're taking care of yourself.

When in doubt, just breathe.

Likely, there will be more ups and downs in your future.

Lean on the strategies we've laid out in this guide, and continue to (aggressively) elbow out more room for joy, pleasure, and well-being.

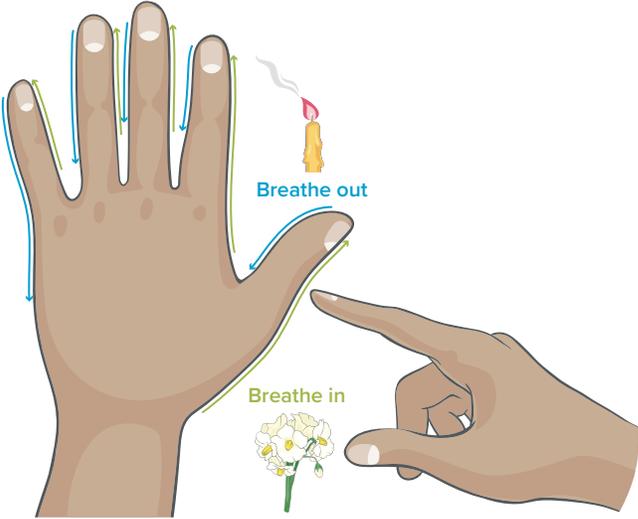
And regardless of what's going on in your life, remember to breathe.

Most of the time, you breathe unconsciously. However, you can also breathe consciously in order to calm your mind and body.



Here's a simple exercise to try (Bonus: it's great for adults and kids alike):

5-FINGER BREATHING



- Lift up one hand. Using a finger of the opposite hand, slowly trace the outline of your first hand, going up and down the length of the fingers.
- As you go up one finger, breathe in. Use the cue, "Smell a flower."
- As you go down the finger, breathe out. Use the cue, "Blow out a candle."

By the end of the hand, you'll have

- done this five times, and will probably notice a difference in your physiological response.

As you practice this technique, you can also remind yourself of something really important:

You're alive.

(Your breath is evidence of that.)

You're here.

You're doing something good for yourself.

Change is happening.



Looking to help clients (or yourself) achieve deeper change?

More than ever, people are struggling with their nutrition, fitness, and health. What's missing? Sleep, stress management, and recovery.

PN's brand-new [Level 1 Sleep, Stress Management, and Recovery Coaching Certification](#) helps you:

- **Develop a personalized sleep, stress management, and recovery plan**—for yourself, *and* your clients—based on strategies from industry-leading experts
- **Gain confidence and a competitive edge** as one of the first health and fitness coaches to specialize in sleep, stress, and recovery—thriving where other coaches fail to make a difference
- **Support clients who are overwhelmed and burnt out**, so they can feel energetic, successful, and in control again—and give you rave referrals
- **Save time and energy** researching, vetting, and putting together resources for clients who struggle with sleep, stress, or recovery, with a “one stop shop” of evidence-based information and shareable tools

To learn more and join the waitlist for the [Level 1 Sleep, Stress Management, and Recovery Coaching Certification](#), [click here](#).

