

S.H.A.D.E.S.

a self-care framework

By Jessica Bencomo

S.H.A.D.E.S.: A Self-Care Framework

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Hey there, you with the face! This little book is my creation, so please be cool with it. Feel free to use these ideas for your own personal journey (that's the whole point, of course), but don't go copying, selling, or redistributing this without asking me first. I worked really hard on it, ya know.

If you want to share this with friends because you think it's awesome (thank you!), just send them my way instead of sending them the file. I'd love to connect with more people who are into self-care and mindfulness.

Questions, comments, or just want to tell me if/how this helped you?

Email me at: mindofsnaps@gmail.com or find me on Twitch at Twitch.tv/SheSnaps or on social media pretty much everywhere under the handle @mindofsnaps.

First Edition - October 2025

Dedication

This sweet little eBook is dedicated to my loving partner Alex and my big beautiful family, but especially my pride and joy, Alina. May you grow up knowing how to care for yourself in all the ways you deserve. May you always feel loved and seen.

It's also dedicated to the incredible community I've been blessed to know for 10 years on Twitch. You have all changed my life for the better, and continue to do so daily. I will forever be grateful for your support, conversations and shenanigans. I hope this book proves to be a beneficial resource for you all as you continue on your journey of mindfulness and well-being. May you also always feel loved and seen.

I love you all and I'm so proud of you.

- Jessica / Snaps

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S.H.A.D.E.S.: A Self-Care Framework







Introduction to S.H.A.D.E.S.

Welcome to the S.H.A.D.E.S. for Self-Care eBook!

First off, I'm so glad you're here. My goal with this book is to give you a straightforward, no-pressure guide to making simple changes that have worked for me and many others in our community over the years. I'm writing this as a person biased by my own perspective, but I have tried my best to keep other possible perspectives and life experiences in mind. If I have overlooked or omitted anything that feels important or relevant to you, please let me know.

This book introduces you to the S.H.A.D.E.S. framework, which is all about balancing the key areas of health and wellness. Some sections will probably be real **thicc** (looking at you, sleep and stillness), while others (like hydration) will be quicker and to the point. No matter the section, you'll find practical steps to help you shift your habits and build a routine that supports you.

S.H.A.D.E.S. stands for:

-  ● Sleep
-  ● Hydration
-  ● Air (getting outside)
-  ● Diet
-  ● Exercise
-  ● Stillness (stuff like meditation, journaling, mindfulness)

While each letter of SHADES can help on its own, they work best as a team. Better sleep helps you make better food choices. Good hydration supports your exercise. Time in nature calms your mind for meditation. Movement helps you sleep. It's all connected, and small improvements in one area often create positive ripples in others.

Here's the deal with S.H.A.D.E.S.: we're aiming roughly for a 80/20 balance. 80% of the time, we make choices that focus on our health and wellness, while the other 20% is for letting ourselves have a little flexibility and fun. Stay up a bit late, enjoy that treat you know offers zero nutritional value, or just let yourself blob around for a day or so.

You can use S.H.A.D.E.S. *proactively* by planning your week (with the 80/20 guideline this could mean weekdays are more consistent and weekends are more flexible) or *reactively* if you're feeling low energy and need a quick check-in. This approach is all about making small, realistic changes that work for you, no perfection required.

Above all, I want to remind you to **approach this with kindness**. Don't beat yourself up over the areas where you think you could do better. Building new routines can be tough, so it's important to be gentle with yourself as you go. Judgment just makes it harder to stay on track.

I really hope this book feels like a helpful guide as you make small tweaks to your habits and live a life that feels good **to you**.

How to Use This Book

- Everything is outlined well in the Table of Contents, so feel free to jump around. If you feel like you've got Sleep pretty well covered, skip ahead to whatever feels most supportive.
- Reminder: We're not trying to become perfect in any of these categories. This is an intuitive process and it requires you to tune into your body's reactions as often as possible while you make whatever changes feel right to you. Try the things that seem like they'd be beneficial, and aim for around 80/20 in terms of implementation. Life would be boring as shit if we didn't let ourselves do some things that weren't strictly for our health. You deserve pizza and the occasional late night filled with chaos, too.

S: Sleep

"Sleep is the best meditation."

- Dalai Lama

At a Glance

- Sleep isn't just the result of good mental health - it's actually a cause of it too (*shocking, right? Good rest is good for us.*)
- Your body loves routines - LOVES them. Setting one up for bedtime is basically training your brain to know when to chill tf out.
- Turning your bedroom into a sleep *sanctuary* helps your body know "oh, it's time to wind down" the second you walk in.
- Working with racing thoughts at night? Mindfulness can help you let them go and relax into restful slumber...where you'll probably dream of giraffes on skateboards or something equally awesome.
- Small, consistent tweaks beat trying to overhaul your entire sleep routine overnight. Slow and steady wins the race. Don't make yourself miserable trying to force your body to change immediately.

Why Sleep Matters

"A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book."

- Irish Proverb

You deserve to rest easy at night and wake up feeling refreshed each morning.

It may feel like an impossible task, but as it turns out, there are numerous ways we can work to improve our sleep quality at night, as well as help ourselves to fall asleep faster.

About 37% of U.S. adults don't get enough sleep, which is linked to increased risks of chronic conditions like heart disease and frequent mental distress.

When I went from battling insomnia to actually sleeping through the night, the impact on my mental health and life was shocking. In my mental health talks, I often emphasize that sleep isn't just a result of good mental health but also *a cause*, and that's why it's the foundation of the S.H.A.D.E.S framework.

The Good News

In an article entitled Better Bedtime in a special edition of Time Magazine called "The New Mindfulness", Charles Bae, neurologist and sleep-medicine doctor at the University of Pennsylvania Health System, was quoted saying "The good news is that poor sleep mostly comes from bad habits and lack of routine, which means it's usually easy to correct."

Let's get to correcting - with kindness!

Understanding Your Sleep Needs

*"Each night, when I go to sleep, I die.
And the next morning, when I wake up, I am reborn."*

- Mahatma Gandhi

Most adults need 7-9 hours of quality sleep each night, but your individual needs may vary. The key indicator isn't just hours - it's how you feel upon waking and throughout your day.

Pay (*mindful*) attention to:

- How long it takes you to fall asleep
- How often you wake during the night
- How you feel when you wake up
- Your energy levels throughout the day

Creating a Sleep Schedule

Our bodies and minds thrive on routine. Establish some healthy routines and watch the way your life changes, especially if your sleep schedule is a focus.

Design Your Ideal Schedule

Take some time to think about your life and your goals. Think of all the things you'd like to be able to accomplish during your days and weeks. Then create a sleep schedule that helps support your ability to accomplish those things.

If you want to wake up at 7 a.m., set a bedtime for 10:30 p.m. to allow 8.5 hours for unwinding and sleeping. Update your calendar (I love Google Calendar for this) and block out 10:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m. for winding down and then set a reminder to start preparing for bed.

For folks working night shifts, caring for young children, or dealing with other circumstances that affect sleep timing, these schedules might need creative adaptation - the key is consistency within your unique situation. This is another reason why we want to be viewing S.H.A.D.E.S. as a system, not as a rigid set of rules. In some moments of our lives, or as a result of

neurodivergence, disability or societal factors, some areas may be less possible for us to address as well as we'd like. Rather than give up on all of it because sleep is challenging for now, we can instead emphasize the need to prioritize the rest of S.H.A.D.E.S. to help us stay as balanced as possible while we're working with whatever challenges we're currently facing.



Pro Tip: Do your best not to allow yourself to sleep in too late on days when you don't have to be up early, because it'll make it easier on your body and won't feel as confusing.

Wind-Down Rituals

This section is full of practical tips you can try in order to get better rest at night. Don't worry, it's not expected that you immediately use every suggestion, just browse through and see what feels like something you'd like to try.

When you do, try to be consistent with whatever you try for at least a week or two. It can be hard to see the impacts of new habits right away, but consistency can make a big difference.

Sensory Wind-Down

Turn the lights down & turn the relaxing music on

Turning down the lights and turning on something peaceful or ambient can help you send a signal to your brain that it's wind down time. As you get better at maintaining your routine, your brain will start to recognize this cue and switch into relaxation mode automatically. Teach your body what lowered lights mean and watch it learn to respond appropriately.

Aromatherapy

Light those candles, burn that incense, use those essential oils or lotions. Choose calming scents like lavender, chamomile, or sandalwood, and take a few deep breaths. Some form of aromatherapy can help you create the cue for your brain to notice and say *"Ahh, yes, I know what time it is now, it's time to chill the fuck out."*

Skincare, dental care and maybe even a warm bath

Once you're prepped for the following day, it's time to clean yourself up from the experiences of your current day. Wash your face, put your lotion on and brush and floss your teeth. If you're still feelin' all jacked up and you're partial to baths, feel free to hop in a warm bath and take some deep breaths while you let the stresses of the day be washed away.

Mind-Clearing Activities

Get it all out in your journal

Often it can be difficult for people to rest at night because they spend the majority of their days consuming information in a variety of ways. Countless social media posts, news articles, shows,

books, messages and our own thoughts can begin to accumulate and bog us down if we're not aware.

Taking even 5 minutes to journal and sort of word-vomit out whatever is on your mind before bed can give your mind the cues it needs to feel safe releasing all of the information it's collected during the day. This could spare you the often unpleasant experience of resting your head on your pillow, closing your eyes and then being met with a barrage of thoughts and questions related to the day's experiences. Yep, you're not the only one who faces racing thoughts at night, and now you might understand why a bit more.

(The journaling practice detailed in the Stillness section can be especially helpful here.)

Meditate

Meditation will come up again later in this book, but for right now, here's how it specifically relates to sleep.

The British Psychological Society found that mindfulness meditation specifically (a practice designed to assist in gaining awareness of your thoughts and emotions in a more positive and compassionate manner) can help limit the type of frustrating rumination that tends to interfere with our ability to rest easily at night.

A 2011 study found mindfulness-based stress reduction was as effective as prescription drugs for some with insomnia. *(Not hating on prescription drugs, they're incredibly helpful for many people - myself included - and there are also plenty of folks who'd like to reduce their dependence on certain meds. Trust yourself and the opinions of any mental health professionals you work with.)*

Take a nightly vacation

Pretend you're on a vacation and make the conscious choice to let go of the things your brain and body want you to do. Let them know that this is your time and you will handle those tasks when it's appropriate. When we're on vacation, this seems to be an easier task. We *choose* to allow ourselves to be unburdened and to quickly refocus ourselves away from work or life issues for the sake of the moments we have in this new space.

Imagine each night that your rest is a mini vacation, and let your brain know it can chill out and give you a break for this time, with the understanding that you'll pick up all the tasks again the next day when appropriate.

Movement & Energy

Exercise early, yoga late

Exercise is a crucial part of our mental and physical health, and it can also help you to drain some of your excess energy *(if you're blessed with such a thing)* so you can relax sooner. It's not recommended that you get in a heavy workout right before bed, as it may end up making you feel more alert thanks to the endorphins it's helping to release. If you're feeling restless and have an urge to move your body, a good evening yoga routine might be just the thing for you.

Yoga is great for the body and mind, and if done right, can be relaxing instead of stimulating. *For more on finding movement you enjoy, see the Exercise section.*

Prep for next day

Whether it's work, school, or a fun adventure, prepping the night before can reduce morning stress. Get your clothes ready, get your lunch packed (*and maybe write yourself a little love note, too?*), do whatever it takes to set yourself up for an awesome day. Even just 10-15 minutes of prep can make a big difference in reducing the burden on your mind and on the you of tomorrow. Give future you a break, you'll thank you for it later. (*Literally though, sometimes I find myself saying "thanks past me" for doing things like this.*)

Creating a Sleep Sanctuary

Your bedroom could be a place of rest and relaxation, where your body knows it's time to chill out the moment you walk in. Keeping distractions out of this space helps reinforce that intention.

Bedroom Basics

Designate your bedroom for sleepin and/or sexin

If your bed is also your office, gym, or entertainment zone, it can confuse your brain. Stick to two activities in the bedroom: sleeping and sexin' (*if you're into that kinda thing*). Keeping your work, devices, and to-do lists out of sight creates a stronger association with rest and/or sauciness.

Note: Not everyone is in a privileged enough position to have a bedroom and other areas dedicated to themselves only. If you don't have separate spaces, see if you can at least set up some kind of room organization or layout that allows your mind to recognize that different areas are for different things.

Declutter the space

A cluttered room can lead to a cluttered mind. Take a few minutes to tidy up by putting away laundry (*oops, you didn't forget it in the washer again, did you?*), organizing your bedside table, and clearing out anything that doesn't belong.

No electronics zone

TVs, phones, laptops and that glorious Nintendo Switch emit blue light, which can disrupt your sleep patterns. Plus, constant notifications or mindless scrolling can keep you awake longer than you'd like. If possible, charge your phone outside the bedroom or set it to "Do Not Disturb" mode. Electronics are also intimacy killers, so if that's important to you, get those devices as far away as you can and turn off the TV. (*Personally, I refuse to put a TV in my room because I know what it would do to my habits and to the potential for intimacy.*)

Make the space cozy and calm

Think soft lighting, clean bedding, and minimal distractions. If you live in a small space or studio, try sectioning off your sleeping area with curtains or dividers to create a sense of separation from your daily activities.

Let your bedroom become your own personal retreat center. A place that feels calm, inviting, and free from the chaos of the day. With a little effort, it can become the perfect haven for quality sleep.

Optimizing Your Sleep Environment

Keep house cool

The last thing anyone wants is to wake up in the middle of the night feeling sweaty and uncomfortable. It can be a frustrating experience and that frustration can make it even harder to fall back asleep, or fall asleep in the first place. Get a good blanket (I've heard wonderful things about weighted blankets) and snuggle up under it, then bring that heat down or the a/c up if you can. If possible, invest in a quality thermostat that can also turn the temperature back up the following morning so you're not hiding away in bed afraid to leave the warmth of your bed. Gotta love technology.

Try a sleep mask, some socks & maybe use white or pink noise during sleep

Get yourself a nice sleep mask, if you can. It helps to prevent all light from coming in, even if your eyes are open. It saves me from noticing things around my room that cause my mind to start wandering again. You could also throw some socks on before bed. I know... I know... socks in bed is *weird* for a lot of folks. Here's the deal though: heating up those icy feetsies (footsicles?) of yours causes dilation of the blood vessels, which may help you in signaling to your brain that it's bedtime. I have icy feet usually, so I like to wear socks to bed and then use my monkey toes to take 'em off once they've warmed up.

Now that you've got your eyes and feet covered, literally, we can talk about the white or pink noise (which is apparently just white noise with more bass). If you find yourself distracted or feeling stressed by noises, it may help you to try drowning them out with something else. Using white or pink noise is great, and unlike music, it's unlikely to conjure up any feelings associated with what you're hearing (like hearing a love song or a song about loss).

By the way, if you're doing all of this and still not feeling rested, please try to speak to a physician as there may be other underlying causes.

Sleep Myths & Facts

- ⊗ **Myth #1:** You can just catch up on sleep during the weekend.
- ⊙ **Reality:** Nope, sleep doesn't work like rollover minutes. (*Hah, I'm old.*) Your body prefers consistency over this chaotic sleep pattern. Those weekend sleep-ins might feel good, but they're messing with your internal clock.

- ⊗ **Myth #2:** A lil sippy of alcohol helps you sleep better.
- ⊙ **Reality:** That glass of wine, beer or cocktail might knock you out faster, but it wrecks your REM sleep (the good stuff) and you'll likely wake up feeling less refreshed. Not worth it.

- ⊗ **Myth #3:** Everyone needs exactly 8 hours - no more, no less.
- ✔ **Reality:** We're all different, friends. Some folks rock out at 7 hours, others need 9 to function. The real question is: how do *you* feel when you wake up?
- ⊗ **Myth #4:** If you can't sleep, just keep trying harder.
- ✔ **Reality:** Lying there stressing about not sleeping is the least fun strategy ever. If you're not drifting off after 20 minutes, get up and do something chill with low light, then try again when you actually feel sleepy. Alternatively, you could stay in bed and do a body scan meditation or some other relaxing guided or solo practice to see if that helps.
- ⊗ **Myth #5:** TV right before bed is fine because it helps you unwind.
- ✔ **Reality:** The blue light from your screen is basically telling your brain "it's daytime, stay awake!" Plus, that "just one more episode" decision isn't doing your sleep schedule any favors.
-



Quick Wins

- Set a bedtime alarm on your phone (weird, right? But it works!)
- Kick your phone out of the bedroom if you can
- Drop your thermostat a couple degrees at night: cool room + warm blankets = magic
- Throw on some socks before bed (I know, *I know*, but trust me on this one)
- Take 5 slow deep breaths before your head hits the pillow to boost the relaxation factor



Recap

Improving sleep quality can transform your health, mood, and life. By sticking to consistent routines, creating a calming bedtime environment, and practicing mindfulness or journaling to clear mental clutter, you can train your mind and body to relax. Small changes, like dimming lights, using aromatherapy, or treating your nightly routine like a mini vacation, send signals to your brain that it's time to rest. Remember that better sleep isn't just about feeling refreshed, it's also a crucial component of your overall well-being and happiness.



Next Steps

Ready to prioritize your sleep? Start small. Tonight, pick one tip from the list, whether it's dimming the lights, setting your bedtime, or writing in a journal. Pay attention to how it feels and build from there. Experiment with what works best for you, and remember that consistency is key.



What tip will you work to implement first?

H: Hydration

*"Water is the driving force of all nature."
- Leonardo da Vinci*

At a Glance

- When you're hydrated, everything works better - your brain, your mood, your energy levels
- That random fatigue, hunger, or grumpy-ass mood? Might just be your body saying "water, please!"
- Link drinking water to stuff you already do daily: brush teeth, drink water; get to work, fill up your bottle; heavy sigh over the current state of the world, drink water.
- No single hydration rule works for everyone - your needs change based on how active you are, the weather, and your unique body
- Water-rich foods (like juicy fruits and veggies) do count toward your daily hydration goals so *get that mouth **moist*** (tee hee, moist)

Why Hydration Matters

Babes, you're basically *made of water*. Ok, so there's other stuff in there too, but water makes up around 60% of your body weight and is required to help do a number of important things for you.

For example, water helps with:

- Regulating body temperature (cause you so hot)
- Moistening the tissues in your eyes, nose and mouth
- Protecting your organs and tissues (that seems important, yeah?)
- Carrying nutrients and oxygen to cells
- Lubricating those (possibly creaky) joints of yours
- Flushing out waste from your kidneys and liver
- Dissolving minerals and nutrients to make them accessible to your body
- Giving you opportunities to go "ahh" after you take a big refreshing sip

Understanding Your Hydration Needs

Existing as a human throughout the day involves consistently losing 8-12 cups of water through breathing, sweating, peeing and pooping. It's pretty crucial to replenish that every chance we get.

People need somewhere between 9-12 cups of water or fluids daily, but that can change if you're exercising a ton, hanging out in high altitude spots, spending time out in the heat, eating

tons of fiber (if you're doing this, go you!), or if you're losing more water from drinking things like caffeine and alcohol. Try tracking your water consumption to see what feels like the appropriate amount for you so you can set that as a regular benchmark.

(Proper hydration also supports the exercise habits we'll explore later.)

Practical Ways to Stay Hydrated

- Chug water right when you awaken from your glorious REM filled slumber where you dreamt of giraffes on skateboards and sharing your pogs collection with them (with slammers, too, of course). Do this before you have your coffee and watch how well it assists with your wake up energy. *(This pairs perfectly with the sleep schedule you're building - see the Sleep section.)*
- Invest in a reusable water bottle. We love the Earth. We love ourselves. We love not ingesting microplastics whenever possible. This is why we get a quality water bottle and fill it up every chance we get. Oh, and we definitely also *love* washing our water bottles regularly so they don't get funky with the gunky.
- Set hydration goals for yourself based on what you've learned about how much water you seem to need each day.
- Use these goals to set some reminders on your phone, use sticky notes, or maybe hire someone to follow you around and ominously offer you fresh water out of their trenchcoat in the shadows... whatever works for you. *(I don't own a trenchcoat, sorry.)*

Signs of Dehydration

If you lose more fluid than you've been able to take in throughout the day, your body won't have enough water and other fluids to carry out all the normal functions required to keep you movin'. If you don't replace those fluids, you'll end up dehydrated and it *sucks*.

Here are some signs you might be heading towards the discomfort of dehydration:

- Extreme thirst
- Peeing way less often
- Darker colored urine (peep that pee in the potty whenever you can because this can be an easy guide for many)
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Confusion

Becoming dehydrated might lead to heat injury if you're outside or exercising, urinary or kidney problems if this is a prolonged or repeated experience, seizures (this relates to hydration and electrolytes), and potentially even low blood volume shock - this is where your organs don't get what they need to function and I'm guessing you don't have to be told that's not a great thing.

Dehydration is a significant risk factor for kidney stones too, so if you haven't experienced one of those and don't want to *(I dare you to Google image search "kidney stones" and imagine one*

of those traveling out of your body, it'll probably help motivate you.) then it's time to get that hydration managed and regulated.



Quick Wins

- Start your morning with a full glass of water before you even think about that coffee...ok you can *think* about it, but just get the water first while you blow your coffee maker some kisses or something
- Put your water bottle somewhere you can't ignore it - right next to your laptop, phone, or medieval sword
- Set silly hydration reminders with funny names on your phone (like what if you tried "Hey Water You Doing?")
- Too *cool* for plain water? Chuck in some cucumber, lemon, or berries - whatever makes you actually want to drink it
- Mark time goals on your water bottle with a marker so you can see if you're on track



Recap

Staying hydrated is literally essential for your body to function properly. From helping your brain work better to keeping your mood stable, water impacts practically everything. By finding ways to make hydration a habit (like linking it to daily activities or jazzing up your water with fruits), you're setting yourself up for fewer headaches, better energy levels, and overall feeling like a functioning human. I've also noticed that my skin tends to look and feel better when I'm well hydrated.

Remember that hydration needs vary, so pay attention to your body's signals and adjust accordingly. And if you don't get excited about plain water, there are plenty of ways to make it more appealing without adding a bunch of sugar or artificial stuff. You could also work with the resistance to drinking plain water with mindfulness, but that's a whole other story.

Reminder: We're aiming for 80/20 balance, not perfection!



Next Steps

Ready to up your hydration game? Start by figuring out your personal baseline and track how much water you're currently drinking for a few days, then aim to gradually increase if needed.

Pick just one of the Quick Wins to implement tomorrow (the morning water chug is a great place to start). Pay attention to how you feel when you're well-hydrated versus when you're not - noticing the difference can be super motivating. Consider investing in a water bottle you actually like using (like one with unicorns on it!), or try infusing your water with different flavor combinations until you find one that makes you actually want to drink more.



What simple hydration habit will you try first?



A: Air (Getting Outside)

"Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair."

- Kahlil Gibran

At a Glance

- Being in nature literally lowers your stress hormones - your body chills out when you're outside
- Sunlight isn't just for plants - it helps set your body clock and gives you that sweet, sweet (vitamin D)
- Even just 5 minutes outside can reset your brain when you're feeling foggy or stuck
- The air in your home matters too - it affects how well you sleep, think, and breathe
- Moving your body outside? That's like a double whammy of goodness for your brain and body



Why Getting Outside Matters

According to Nielsen data, Americans over 18 years old spend an average of 8 hours 34 minutes per day in front of screens. That's over half of our waking hours spent with our eyes glued to digital devices! If we carry this forward, (and if my math is correct) that means we're potentially spending over 4 months out of a year consuming media. If this is consistent throughout our lives and we manage to hit the delightful age of 79, we will have spent around 21.8 years of our lives consuming media. WTF.

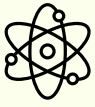
Some of this will be unavoidable due to the nature of work nowadays, but much of this can be limited if we pull back from our dependency on social media and being accessible to everyone at all hours of the day.

If we were to be more mindful of our usage, we'd likely see that much of our time spent online is guided by habit and doesn't actually feel good for us. Like, have you ever gotten home after a long day of work and said "I'm going to just rest a bit before I do x/y/z." and then you plop down on the couch, start scrolling and before you know it the night is gone and you feel *gross*? I know I've had this experience and it sucks.

Those screens can also be a source of stress for many of us, and a consistent increase in stress hormones can be dangerous for us as it increases our potential for heart issues, poor sleep quality, stress disorders and other less than fun possibilities.

This information isn't being shared to shame us, but to put some important context into our thoughts about time outdoors. Is this really how we want to live our lives on this gorgeous

planet? Is this what feels right or meaningful to us? Or, is it possible that we deserve better, and that spending more time outdoors can help us to experience a better quality of life?



The Science of Nature and Wellbeing

There was a study done in Denmark where researchers used satellite data to assess people's exposure to green space from birth to age 10. Then they compared that with long term data on individual mental health outcomes. After reviewing data on over 900,000 people born between 1985 and 2003, they found that kids living in neighborhoods with more green space had a reduced risk of many psychiatric disorders as they aged, including things like depression, mood disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders, and substance use disorder. The kids with the lowest level of green space exposure had a 55% higher risk of developing mental illness. That's pretty significant!

I personally feel incredibly grateful to have grown up in an area surrounded by nature, because while I did struggle with depression, anxiety and insomnia (among other things), I believe being able to be outside as often as I was helped me stay out of (some) trouble, and kept me feeling more grounded overall.

On top of the potential benefits of green spaces on us throughout adolescence, for those of us who (begrudgingly) acknowledge our adulthood, getting outside can help us in a number of ways, too. Outdoor time is linked with improved thinking, reasoning and other cognitive abilities like memory. It can also help boost our creativity while decreasing our cortisol (stress) levels, heart rates and blood pressure.

Getting outside at the right times can also help us to sleep better. If we ensure daily exposure to natural light, it can help our bodies more easily regulate our sleep/wake cycles. I've definitely found that getting outside as early as I can and enjoying a little of the morning light (even on cloudy days) makes a huge difference in my alertness and in my sleep habits as well.

There's fascinating research on how nature exposure actually changes our brain chemistry, too. Being in natural settings increases serotonin production (that's the "feel good" neurotransmitter) and helps regulate dopamine (wassup fellow ADHDers) levels. This can often be felt as an immediate mood boost when stepping outside into a park or forest. Studies have found that just 20 minutes in nature can significantly lower stress hormone levels. And these benefits aren't just temporary either because regular nature exposure has been linked to long term improvements in emotional resilience and reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety. Our brains and bodies evolved in natural environments for thousands of years, so it makes sense that we function better when we reconnect with these spaces. (Look into the biophilia hypothesis, it's interesting.)

If you're trying to learn difficult topics, getting outside for a walk can also help you to better understand the information you're working to process, and can improve your memory retention as well. It's also great for folks struggling with creative blocks - bring an important question or idea to mind and then go meander about in green spaces and see what your mind can do once it's no longer locked in a room in front of a screen.

There's also evidence now that even something as simple as viewing images of nature, or staring out a window for less than a minute in the middle of difficult tasks can improve our moods, alertness and ability to focus. The real deal is best, like actually going outside, but if that's not possible, stare out a window or maybe watch one of those awesome YouTube videos of someone silently walking or hiking in a scenic area. I love those.

So now that we know nature is basically a superpower for our brains and bodies, how do we actually make it happen in our busy, sometimes nature-deprived lives? Sure, in an ideal world, we'd all have access to pristine forests and beaches, with plenty of time to wander mindfully through them. But the reality for many of us involves urban living, packed schedules, and sometimes challenging weather conditions. The good news is that even small doses of outdoor time can deliver meaningful benefits. This doesn't have to be all-or-nothing.

Now we'll look at some practical ways to get your nature fix, no matter your circumstances.

Making Outdoor Time Happen

When I talk to people about getting outside, there are a number of potential challenges people face that come up often. Sometimes it's avoidance of cold or unfavorable weather that keeps people indoors, sometimes it's a lack of nearby green spaces, sometimes it's a lack of time overall.

"When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."

- Wendell Berry

If we address the weather situation first, I'd like to suggest that we allow ourselves to practice being comfortable with being uncomfortable - especially when we know it benefits us in the long run (or even in the immediate short term). What I'm saying is, if possible, get some warmer clothes on and get 5 minutes outside even if it's cold as hell. Practice allowing yourself to feel cold for a bit in exchange for some deep breaths of fresh air, open skies, lower stress levels and heightened creativity.

For folks lacking nearby green spaces, and/or for folks who don't have much time, it's probably going to be helpful for you to establish some kind of schedule where you plan ahead to incorporate outdoor time each week or each month. Maybe two Saturdays a month you need to take the bus (or a few buses) to a park or forest preserve area. Maybe you need to work with others to establish a carpool situation where you can get out semi-frequently as a group. Whatever your current situation is, if you were to think creatively about how you can get more

outside time - especially around nature, I feel confident you can come up with some way to offer yourself this wonderful gift. You deserve to be able to hug a tree once in a while, for real. (*Please say hi to the trees for me when you see them.*)

For folks whose neighborhoods don't feel safe for outdoor time, or who face other barriers to getting outside, focusing on indoor air quality and even opening windows when possible can still provide benefits.



Indoor Air Quality

This section has a heavy emphasis on getting your buns outta the house, but since we're already talking about fresh air, it's probably a good idea to mention that your indoor air quality is important too.

Air quality can impact our cognition, our health, and our mindsets. Especially in a world where things like infectious diseases and pollution have been normalized or minimized, we need to be taking precautions whenever possible to keep our air clean and our lungs happy.

"With every breath, I plant the seeds of devotion, I am a farmer of the heart. "
- Rumi

Getting some air purifying plants can be a great start even if they are probably not enough on their own, and they offer the added bonus of you developing the green thumb I know you are capable of having. (*I also killed every plant I had until I learned enough to keep them alive. Now I have plant babies in nearly every room and they bring such joy.*) Some plants are more skilled at this than others, like spider plants, peace lilies, snake plants and pothos. I would say if you're brand new to plants, try out pothos (but keep them away from your pets) because they are surprisingly easy to manage. Put 'em somewhere where they can "see" the sky and not be burned by direct sunbeams. When planted in soil, just wait for them to get a *bit* dramatic and droopy before watering. They can live *in* water too, which I really like for the aesthetics because being able to see their roots is fun.

Regularly replacing your home's air filters and even vacuum filters with HEPA filters can be a lower cost way to improve air quality, and if possible, investing in a quality standalone HEPA air filter could make a significant difference as well. If that's out of the budget, simply turning on the fans and opening windows regularly (this may not be an option for folks living in areas prone to wildfires) can have a similar impact. Switching away from heavy chemicals as cleaning products can also make a difference. Many of those products as well as synthetic air fresheners and even candles can release things called VOCs (volatile organic compounds) that will gunk up your air quality. If you're going to continue using them, do your best to ventilate the area being cleaned well, as inhaling cleaning solutions for a long period of time can be bad for your health.

Switching to natural cleaning solutions like vinegar, baking soda and essential oils can help reduce pollutants, and you could also use beeswax or soy candles instead of the standard ones.

And listen, I *love* rockin' out with candles and incense occasionally, too, but I think I love fresh, clean air *more*. Especially because improved air quality can mean better rest, better cognitive function, and even reduced issues with allergies. As with everything else, if you *love* the scented products and cleaning solutions, maybe work to reduce your usage a bit rather than quitting that patchouli cold turkey.



Quick Wins

- Take a quick "fresh air break" between the dreaded monotony of Zoom calls - your brain will thank you
- Grab lunch outside when the weather's decent instead of at your desk
- Open your windows for just 10 minutes a day - it's like hitting the reset button on your indoor air
- Get some plants for your space - they're basically little air purifiers that also look cute and you can name them things like "Ralph" or "Franchesca"
- Park a bit further from wherever you're going - easy way to get more outside time



Recap

Getting outside isn't just nice, it's essential for us as human creatures. When we trade some screen time for green time (that's fun to say), we're investing in better sleep, improved mood, less stress, and more creativity. Even small doses of nature can reset your system and help you feel more capable of people-ing. A quick park visit, lunch break outside, or simply opening your windows can make a difference. And when you can't get outside, bringing nature indoors through plants and better air quality still helps. This isn't about being perfect or uncomfortable. It's about finding small, consistent ways to reconnect with the natural world our bodies and brains were built for. You deserve this.



Next Steps

Ready for more fresh air? Start by noticing how much time you spend outdoors versus on screens. Then pick just one outdoor activity to try this week. Maybe drink your morning coffee outside, take a walking meeting instead of a Zoom call, or explore a nearby park you've never visited. Pay *kind* attention to how you feel before, during, and after. For your indoor space, choose one air-improving change like adding a plant to your workspace or opening windows daily for 10 minutes. Remember that consistency beats intensity. Small daily habits will benefit you more than occasional big nature adventures, but honestly, why not do both?



What simple outdoor habit will you try this week?



Potential Trigger Warning

We're about to head into the section on Diet, and I wanted to give you the option to skip this section entirely if you need to. Simply go back to the [Table of Contents](#) and move on to whatever section you'd prefer.

I have attempted to be as mindful as possible about how the information in this section is presented, as I'm aware there are many folks who have struggled with or are seeking treatment for disordered eating. I do not believe our current society is understanding enough of the difficulties many people face with food, and would love to see a healthier and more compassionate shift towards care and support for folks in need of assistance with establishing more supportive habits around eating.

The word "Diet" is not being used as an indication of a need for any specific type of diet or a suggestion for dieting. It was just the best word I could use to cover the category of food/nutrition and still have an acronym that makes sense. **Weight will not be mentioned, nor will anything prescriptive be offered.**

This section is intended to be focused on establishing a more mindful relationship with our bodies and the ways we nourish them. Please be sure to consult with medical professionals or nutritionists if you are wanting specific ways to adjust your diet to meet your needs or goals.

The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD) is an organization that offers free peer support services to anyone struggling with an eating disorder, regardless of age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or background. [This is a link to their website](#) if you are in need of additional support or guidance.



D: Diet

"Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food."

- Hippocrates



At a Glance

- Food isn't just delicious, it's fuel and it directly impacts your mood, energy, and long term health
- Mindful eating can help you enjoy food more and develop a healthier relationship with it
- Forget wildly restrictive diets - small, sustainable changes can be much easier to stick with and don't require such intense mental effort to maintain
- The 80/20 approach gives you structure without making you feel deprived
- Food should be both nourishing AND enjoyable - you deserve both, not one or the other

Why Diet Matters

The things we consume impact us in ways we aren't always conscious of. I know for myself, I was diagnosed with IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome) and Lactose Intolerance around 5th grade. I did not receive much guidance or support aside from a reminder to avoid drinking milk or eating dairy. Eating and nutrition weren't really discussed often (*at least not in healthy or supportive ways*), and there were long periods of my life where fast food was the go-to choice for sustenance because I didn't have much time outside of work. I spent years of my life believing it was normal for me to feel bloated and uncomfortable constantly and it wasn't until I was introduced to mindfulness that I began to realize how my food habits were impacting my life.

Much like flowers, which exist as a collection of non-flower elements like soil, sunlight, water and air, we too are composed of tons of non-us elements like food, water, air and sunlight. If we were to put a flower in a pot filled with sand instead of soil, it would likely not survive - and if it did (like some cool desert plants), it would need to work much harder to extract what little nutrition is available to it. Our bodies can sometimes adapt to less-than-nutritious food sources, but they have to work *really* hard to do so, and that comes at a cost to us. It can deplete our energy levels, mess up our moods, and cause all sorts of long term issues.

I heard this phrase a while back that I repeat often (cannot remember the source) - "*Your body is completely loyal to you.*" I found this to be quite an interesting reframing of how many of us tend to view our bodies - as enemies, as something to be kicked into gear or scolded for not working properly when we need it to. I've had this realization in silly ways at times, like in moments where I'm wondering why my body can't just get its shit together, only to realize I had been forcing it to subsist on caffeine and ultra-processed foods for days - not giving it anything it actually needs to function properly or to experience energy or vitality.

The reality is, your body *wants* to do the things you've pointed it towards. It is trying its best to keep you upright and moving through life. It deserves your care and kindness in every way you're able to offer, especially with the food you choose to provide it with.

Rather than taking this as a sign to do a rapid overhaul of your diet and cut out everything that doesn't offer nutrients, it might be helpful instead to start considering what you could benefit from more of, and begin incorporating those things whenever possible. Or, put another way, *add before you subtract*.

Mindful Eating

When I teach meditation workshops, we typically do a mindful eating exercise to help people reconnect to their food and the habit of eating in general. I'll be recording and posting one on my MindofSnaps YouTube channel in the future, so keep an eye out for that.

Here are some general guidelines for mindful eating that don't require you to follow along with a guided exercise.

Engage with your Senses

Before you begin eating, you could pretend you're an alien on this planet about to ingest food for the first time. This human suit of yours needs to eat, and so you sit down in front of a meal and begin the process of exploring this process of eating as a human. How fascinating!

You might begin with a thorough examination of the food before you. What do you notice about its appearance? Can you notice different colors, shapes, textures? Does it look enticing? Does exploring it visually cause any bodily sensations or changes, like maybe mouth watering?

From there, you could pick up a bite of the food with your fingers or utensils. Feel it. Maybe try touching it gently with your fingers, or you could notice the way your hand feels as it holds it in place. What other feelings do you notice in your body as you touch or hold your food? (*For me, this is when my mind tends to show me images of me putting the food in my mouth hole, it can be quite impatient.*)

After exploring the feelings of the food, now you could tune in to see if you can hear it in any way. Is the food still hot enough to be sizzling slightly? If you move it around on the plate does it make any interesting sounds? What types of auditory experiences are apparent, if any?

Once you've placed it in your mouth, what do you notice? Can you become aware of how your tongue skillfully moves the bits of food around and how your teeth move to grind it down so it can be more easily swallowed?

Can you notice the first moment the urge to swallow arises? Can you choose to continue chewing a bit longer instead, and only swallowing once you're able to do it intentionally?

After swallowing, do you notice an immediate desire to have another bite? Oftentimes my hand will reach for another piece of whatever I'm eating before I've even finished chewing my first bite, does your body do something similar?

How does it feel to be moving slowly with this meal, rather than allowing your body to shovel food in on autopilot mode?

Throughout the meal, can you pause occasionally to tune into your body? Maybe inquire as to whether you've had enough, or if your body feels it requires more to be fully sated.

Once you've finished, can you rest mindfully for a few minutes, tuning in and seeing how your body feels post-meal? Does it feel comfortable? Uncomfortable? Bloating? Over-full? Do you feel like you could get up and move around, or do you feel like you need a nap now? *(These are just possibilities, not an exhaustive list of the possible ways your body might be feeling after eating.)*

It could be helpful as you gradually work to adjust your diet to be more supportive of your body's needs to schedule regular check-ins with your body. Maybe first thing in the morning you check in with yourself and ask how your stomach is feeling, what your energy levels seem like, if you feel like whatever you ate yesterday was something you'd like to repeat again or not. Perhaps you set a phone timer to check in with yourself an hour or so after eating and make a quick note for yourself, something like "feeling extra sleepy" or "feeling bloated and uncomfortable" or "feeling surprisingly energized".

This general check-in has been an incredibly useful way to gradually change my eating habits over time. Actually *feeling* the icky feelings and extra fatigue of eating foods that don't agree with my dietary needs was what finally helped me stop eating most of them. Noticing how good I can feel after eating certain foods made me want to eat more of them. No guilt or shame needed, just an honest assessment of how that food feels in your body once it's in there.

To be clear, it may take a few (or more) times of feeling the "ouch" of the foods that don't vibe well with you before your mind finally agrees to stop eating them. For me, I remember realizing that a certain Asian style fast food restaurant made me feel super tired and gross after eating it, but it took another 3 times before I finally was able to say "no more". I haven't had it since, and saying "no thanks" is easier than it ever has been because I was able to mindfully recognize how I actually felt after eating. There is no need to rush yourself out of habits. Feel them fully, with kindness and compassion, and do your best. There are some foods I just don't keep in the house because even with full awareness of their detrimental impacts, it is really difficult to stop myself from going too hard on them.

(This connects to the mindfulness practices we'll dive deeper into in the Stillness section.)

The 80/20 Approach

As with the other letters in S.H.A.D.E.S., going with a 80/20 approach can be really helpful as a general guide. Maybe Monday through Friday you eat with your nutritional and energy needs in mind, and then when the weekend hits you're a *bit* more lax. (*Please note that I am **not** suggesting eating in a rigid way throughout the week and then choosing to overeat all the things you've avoided once the weekend hits. You can still be mindful when you're in the 20% part of the game.*)

The 80/20 approach can be used proactively to plan out meals for the entire week with nutrition, energy needs and enjoyment in mind, and it can also be used reactively throughout your days if you find yourself experiencing a midday slump or something similar.

For example, if the afternoon hits and I'm starting to feel really sluggish, if I go through S.H.A.D.E.S. quickly in my mind, I'll realize I actually didn't prioritize my body's needs in the first half of the day and didn't really eat well. At this point, I'll probably choose to *kindly* shift towards eating something ultra nutritious and filling for my evening meal - something like a big ass salad with some yummy protein like chicken or salmon. This is not intended as a punishment meal, like "*Aw man, I ate like shit now I have to eat a salad to make up for it.*", it actually tends to feel *exciting* to me, to realize I could course-correct a bit and make it more likely that I'll feel better in the evening and the following day. I also *love* salad, but if you don't, there's probably some kind of meal you *do* enjoy that's packed with veggies or other awesomeness, so maybe you can offer that to yourself as a lovely little gift. Like, "*Hey body, I brought you this bouquet of broccoli because I know you love it and it feels great in your tummy!*" Hooray for nutrients!

Practical Food Tips



Get That Fiber: Americans in particular are known for having diets significantly lacking in dietary fiber. An estimated 95% of us are not meeting the intake recommendations for this crucial nutrient. This can mean increased risks of heart disease, stroke, hypertension, gastrointestinal disorders, obesity, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. If you want to make a positive impact on your diet, you could start by choosing to incorporate more fruits, veggies, whole grains, nuts, seeds and/or legumes to ensure you're getting enough dietary fiber. Your poops will thank you.



Add before you Subtract: It was mentioned earlier, but to restate: try to *add* before you *subtract*. There was a great video I saw years ago that demonstrated this through a bowl of cereal. The cereal itself wasn't very nutritious, but rather than saying "I can't eat this anymore.", the nutritionist narrating the video said to *add* granola, hemp seeds and fresh fruit to the cereal, along with some whole milk. Suddenly this meal that wasn't going to offer much other than the initial enjoyment was packing a great nutritional punch, likely to help jump start the day.



Food Waste / Planning: As a neurodivergent person, food waste was a common source of frustration and meal times could be mentally draining and exhausting. Choosing to create a weekly meal plan just for dinners has saved me so much time and energy and reduced overall food waste significantly. If you're someone who also struggles to remember what you have on hand, keeping a list in an easy to see location and using that list to create a meal plan can offer a lot of mental relief and can save you from wasting food (and money). There are also cute little magnets people have made that can be used to indicate what foods are available in the fridge in case they're hiding in drawers or behind other foods, so things don't get forgotten or missed.



Possible Limitations: Many people live in areas known as food deserts, where access to fresh, quality food is limited. Others may struggle with finances, and find it to be difficult to afford the foods they know they deserve and need. For anyone in circumstances like these, please remember that even small improvements or substitutions can be beneficial whenever possible. And above all, please know it is not your fault if you cannot afford to keep your home stocked with fresh or nutrient dense foods. Especially in the U.S., there are systemic reasons for lack of access to nutritious foods and it would be unwise to accept sole personal responsibility for something we should all have easy, inexpensive access to. As a side note, it might be worthwhile to consider why anyone in this world isn't being fed properly when we have more than enough to go around. **Cough* we need more class consciousness*cough** (Sorry about that, I must be coming down with something.)



Quick Wins

- Add one extra veggie to your day - even if it's just going into a smoothie
- Drink a glass of water before meals - sometimes thirst masquerades as hunger
- Take three slow deep breaths before eating to switch from "rush mode" to "actually enjoy this food" mode
- Try **one** meal a day without scrolling or watching videos - actually *tasting* your food is wild, I promise (plus, we tend to miss our bodily cues for fullness when distracted while eating)
- Pre-cut veggies at eye-level in your fridge means you'll actually grab them when you're hungry - this also works on children and even toddlers!



Recap

Food is about so much more than just calories or weight - it's literally the building material for your dope ass human body and has a direct impact on how you feel, think, and move through the world. By bringing mindfulness to eating, you can start to notice how different foods actually affect you personally, without judgment or rigid rules. The 80/20 approach gives you flexibility while still prioritizing foods that help you feel good most of the time. Remember that "add before

subtract" is usually more sustainable than cutting things out, and that listening to your unique body is more valuable than following any generic food plan. Your body is incredibly loyal to you and deserves your kindness and attention in return, especially when it comes to how you nourish it.



Next Steps

Ready to explore a more mindful approach to eating? Start by experimenting with one truly mindful meal this week - no screens, no rushing, just full awareness of the food and your body's response. Notice how different foods make you feel in the hours afterward. Consider tracking these observations in a simple journal for a few days, looking for patterns **without judgment**. Try adding one new nourishing food before taking anything away, whether that's an extra veggie at dinner or a new protein source you've been curious about. And most importantly, practice relating to food choices with the same compassion you'd offer a good friend - no harsh self-talk allowed when you reach for those cookies sometimes. The goal isn't perfection, it's a gradually evolving relationship with food that supports the entirety of your beautiful being.



What's one small change you might try to bring more mindfulness to your eating this week?

"Most of our citizenry believes that hunger only affects people who are lazy or people who are just looking for a handout, people who don't want to work, but, sadly, that is not true. Over one-third of our hungry people are innocent children who are members of households that simply cannot provide enough food or proper nutrition. And to think of the elderly suffering from malnutrition is just too hard for most of us. Unlike Third World nations, in our country the problem is not having too little – it is about not caring enough! Write your elected representatives and promote support for the hungry."

- Erin Brokovich

E: Exercise

If we could give every individual the right amount of nourishment and exercise, not too little and not too much, we would have found the safest way to health. Hippocrates

At a Glance

- Movement isn't just for your body - it's a major mood booster and stress reliever too
- The best exercise is one you actually enjoy
- Those little movement breaks throughout the day add up - walking while on the phone, dancing in your kitchen, skankin' while vacuuming - whatever you like to do
- Moving regularly helps you sleep better, stress less, and generally feel more like a functioning human creature

Why Movement Matters

Exercise can mean many different things to different people, so I'll be referring more to the necessity of physical activity and/or movement primarily in this section. The word "exercise" just happened to be the best word to use to create the acronym S.H.A.D.E.S., but it's not one we need to stick with if it doesn't feel supportive of your needs.

Movement is important for us human creatures for a number of reasons. Keeping a healthy habit of movement or physical activity can be an important step in preventing or managing many types of health issues or concerns, such as: stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, depression, anxiety, many types of cancer, arthritis, dementia and more.

Physical activity can also help reduce the risks of serious outcomes from infectious diseases, like COVID, the flu, and pneumonia. Folks who are physically active are less likely to get very sick from COVID, which also means a lower likelihood of needing to be hospitalized or of dying. Inactivity *increases* those risks. Active folks are also less likely to die from the flu or from pneumonia as well.

As our bodies age, movement is also a necessary step to help avoid one of the most dangerous things we face in our senior years - falling. According to the CDC, falls are the leading cause of injury for adults ages 65 and older. Nearly a quarter of older adults report falling annually. They are also the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults.

In my seventies, I exercised to stay ambulatory. In my eighties, I exercise to avoid assisted living. - Dick Van Dyke

The fall rate has been increasing over time as well, which personally, I think may relate to a number of systemic issues along with the reality that our lives have become more sedentary over time now that so many jobs and activities have moved into the online space.

Having said that, it's crucial that we begin to establish healthy habits around movement and physical activity as early as possible so we can maintain enough strength and flexibility to move throughout our lives with balance and stability for as long as possible.

There was a post I saw once that suggested looking into the future, into our 80's and asking ourselves what we'd like to be capable of during that time, and then building appropriate habits or exercises into our days with that in mind. Examples offered were things like: "I want to be able to pick up my grandkids from the ground while squatting.", "I want to be able to run around with my kids or grandchildren for at least 15 minutes without getting winded.", "I want to be able to continue a habit of baking or of gardening." and other things like that. Simple things we may take for granted could mean losing the ability to do if we don't maintain the types of habits that allow us to easily reach for stuff on high shelves, pick stuff up from the ground, or move with energy or enthusiasm while playing. Different bodies will require different types of physical activity, which is why we won't be getting into specifics on *how* to exercise, but rather we'll instead be pointing towards the need for it and benefits of it. There are all kinds of gentle activities for folks who need low impact movement, like yoga, tai chi, walking, chair exercises, etc., and there are also plenty of ways to go higher intensity and build muscle or endurance.

It's important to acknowledge that physical limitations, disabilities, and chronic conditions can significantly affect how people engage with movement. Please know that any movement that feels good and works for your unique body is valuable. Adaptations aren't 'lesser' forms of exercise either, they're smart, personalized approaches to movement that honor your body's needs.

One simple way for able-bodied individuals to address our movement needs is to walk more, because taking more steps daily helps reduce the risk of premature death from all causes. It can also help people with chronic conditions and disabilities to reduce pain and improve function, mood and quality of life.

Try out some different exercises based on your body's unique needs and any goals you may have, and see how you feel about them, because as we'll dive into next, finding things you enjoy will be crucial to the longevity of these important habits.

Finding Joy in Movement

Physical activity isn't something everyone feels drawn to, or excited to do. This is ok, and it's also important that we do move our bodies as often as possible - with around 30 minutes of activity (total) per day being the goal. The best way to ensure we hit this general target, is to find things we enjoy doing and do those things often.

For some folks, they may find that dancing is what keeps them coming back to movement because it's fun and gets their heart pumping. Others may find running to be a blast, and the runner's high they get keeps them hooked into the habit. Maybe your favorite type of physical activity is lifting weights, swimming, axe throwing, playing pickleball (which thankfully has no pickles involved) or some other unnamed but ultra fun and interesting option.

The good news is that movement doesn't require expensive gym memberships, fancy equipment, or special clothes like pastel leotards. Some of the most beneficial activities like walking, basic stretching, dancing in your living room, or bodyweight exercises - cost absolutely *nothing*. YouTube is also packed with free workout videos for every ability level and interest. Different cultures and communities also have their own movement traditions - from martial arts to traditional dances to community sports - and all approaches are equally valid ways to stay active.

If you don't know what you'd enjoy yet, it's time to get into testing things out. Try as many different activities as you feel you need to, with the understanding that you're not locked into any of them. Maybe some days you do yoga at home, some days you go for a light jog, others you lift weights and once a week you do riverdance flash mobs - get as creative as you need to to establish a healthy habit of moving daily. Also, some days you will *not* want to do it because you will be a tired, tired baby. Learn to do it anyway. Teach yourself that sometimes you just gotta do it tired. The good news is, the movement will likely boost your energy levels, so you may go into your flash mob feeling sluggish and sleepy, but you'll exit feeling more awake and energized.



*Note: for some types of disabilities, "doing it tired" is **not** recommended, so please remember these are general guidelines and will not apply to everyone at all times. Trust the guidance of the medical / mental health professionals and of your gut feelings above me, a person who has no idea what it's like to live in your body with all its specific needs.*

Pay mindful attention to whether you thrive with community-based movement or prefer solo activities. Some folks get energized by the social connections and accountability of group classes, team sports, or walking with friends (there are even walking groups in many areas you can connect with online). Others find peace and focus in moving alone, where they can go at their own pace without social pressure. Both approaches are equally valid. What matters is what helps you show up consistently.

Remember that if exercise feels monotonous or like a punishment for you, it's incredibly likely that you will find every excuse you need to avoid doing it regularly, and the habit will die out. Don't force yourself to move in ways you don't enjoy.

And don't forget the importance of rest days and recovery. Pushing yourself to move intensely every single day can lead to burnout or injury. Listen to your body when it asks for rest. Balance more demanding activities with gentler ones, and remember that quality sleep and proper hydration (if only there was an acronym that included such needs...hmmm) are crucial parts of supporting an active lifestyle.

Follow your fun and move those buns!

Movement and Mental Health

As we explored in the Sleep section, our mental health can be worsened by things like poor sleep habits. Physical activity can help with this aspect of mental health by making it more likely for you to sleep better at night. Whenever we're out in the world with our toddler and she's running wild, inevitably someone will remark: "She's gonna sleep good tonight!" and she typically does. Toddlers are unique beings in many ways, but this benefit of physical activity isn't limited to tiny people still growing kneecaps. As adults, we also benefit from increased activity and better rest is one of the best gifts we can give ourselves - especially because of how positively it can impact our mental health.

On top of getting better rest, greater physical activity can also reduce stress and anxiety, and has been shown to be an important way to combat depression. Sedentary behaviors actually increase the risk of depression, especially if the sedentary behaviors are passive like watching TV or doom scrolling.

Maintaining healthy habits related to movement can help us to have more energy, more cognitive capacity, and can help us build greater self-confidence.

Prioritizing movement is a profound and important aspect of having better mental health - and you deserve to feel good.

Movement Throughout Your Day

Planning ahead can be helpful in ensuring you're getting enough movement throughout the day, but even without a great deal of advanced planning it can be pretty easy to start building in more movement.

When I was in my early 20's, I remember getting interested in finding opportunities to exercise every chance I got. By switching up some basic habits like doing stairs instead of the elevator, parking further away from stores, or doing things like calf-raises while on the phone, I watched my body and energy levels change for the better without having to go too hard on any type of exercise.

Here are some ways you might find you could incorporate a bit more movement into your daily lives:

- Stand up or walk during phone calls (maybe even invest in a standing desk, if possible)
- Take stairs instead of elevators and if it's a small set, maybe even do them twice
- Park further away from places you're visiting while running errands
- Take a short walk on your work breaks or after meals
- Put on some energetic music and dance while cleaning or doing the dishes
- Make time to stretch often throughout the day
- Play tag with my toddler for the 10 hours she'd prefer because please, I am tired

If you consider what your days and weeks typically look like, what are some ways you think you could start incorporating a bit of extra movement into your routines? What are some minor adjustments you could make to increase your flexibility or strength?



Quick Wins

- Do a quick 60-second stretch every hour - set an alarm in your phone or get an accountability buddy to join you
- Take phone calls standing up or walking around - bonus points for pacing outside without looking like you're plotting something nefarious
- The "one song workout" - just move however feels good for the length of one favorite song - like MMMbop - that's a hit still, right??
- Leave workout stuff where you can see it - resistance bands draped over the doorknob, weights by the couch, running shoes in front of the bag of hot cheetos, etc
- Schedule some movement right before stressful parts of your day - it's a great way to feel more prepared for whatever nonsense you've got to address



Recap

Moving your body isn't just about "getting in shape" (especially since you're already people-shaped, great job!) - it's about supporting your mental health, preventing future health issues, and maintaining the ability to fully participate in life as you age. The best kind of movement is the kind you actually enjoy, so don't force yourself to run if you hate running or lift weights if it bores you to tears (weeping at the gym could make the floors more slippery and dangerous). Finding activities that bring you joy makes it way more likely you'll stick with them. Remember that small movement breaks throughout your day count too - those little walks, stretches, and dance parties in your kitchen all add up. Your body is designed to move, and it thrives when you give it regular opportunities to do so. Plus, movement directly supports other aspects of S.H.A.D.E.S. - helping you sleep better, digest food more efficiently, and even think more clearly.



Next Steps

Ready to add more movement to your days? Start by noticing how your body feels after being still for long periods versus how it feels after moving around. Then pick one small, enjoyable way to add movement to your routine - maybe it's a morning stretch session, an evening walk, or dance breaks between tasks. If you're not sure what activities you enjoy, give yourself permission to experiment without commitment. Try different movement styles until something clicks. Remember that consistency beats intensity - a 10-minute daily walk provides more benefits than an occasional two-hour gym session that leaves you dreading the next one. Most importantly, approach movement with curiosity and kindness toward your body. It's not about pushing through pain or forcing yourself to "perform" - it's about discovering how good it feels to move in ways that work for you and keep you feeling more alive.



What type of movement are you most curious to try or bring back into your life?



S: Stillness

"The quieter you become, the more you can hear." - Ram Dass



At a Glance

- Your mind needs stillness to process all the information you've been feeding it all day - without it, those racing bedtime thoughts are inevitable 35
- Mindfulness is just noticing your current experience with kindness - no special cushions or apps required
- Meditation is simply practicing the art of noticing when your mind wanders and gently bringing it back - that's literally it
- Your thoughts are like saliva - your mind will keep producing them whether you pay attention or not, so don't take them too seriously (you're not the one thinking them anyway)
- Even tiny moments of stillness throughout your day (waiting for coffee, riding elevators, taking a bathroom break without your phone) can help reset your nervous system when life feels chaotic
- Stillness isn't about stopping thoughts or achieving some zen state - it's about learning to surf the waves of life instead of getting constantly knocked over by them

Why Stillness Matters

For many of us, we spend the majority of our days in information consumption mode. We wake up, reach for the phone and check our texts, emails, and possibly even social media. We listen to music or podcasts on our way to work, we scroll through socials on breaks and continue this process of taking in information up until we prepare for bed at night.

When we finally do crawl into our super cozy ninja turtle sheets and lay our heads on our pillows for rest, this can often be the first time our minds have an opportunity to just exist without information and sensory data being blasted at them. So what happens? Our minds light up like a chaotic firework show and start poppin' off with different ideas and questions and thoughts - which can be overwhelming and can make it difficult to fall asleep.

Why does this happen? Our minds *need* stillness. **Need.** They need time and space to process the information we've given them and determine what should be converted to long term memory, what needs to be addressed in some way, and what can be released. For us, without this understanding, we can unintentionally start avoiding rest time because we fear the racing thoughts that happen once our eyes close. We see it as a sign of something going wrong, when in reality our minds are just doing what they are designed to do. They're doing their best to make sense of our world and keep us safe and functioning as well as possible.

The foods we consume require digestion, and some will take up more energy and offer less nutrition than others. Some foods can really bog us down and leave us feeling foggy and tired. Our information diets are similar, some things we consume can go right through us easily, and other things can require a great deal of mental effort and intentional reflection before they can be fully digested and integrated or released. This is where stillness comes in.

For the purposes of this eBook, I'll be outlining only a few forms of stillness, but there are certainly more ways to offer yourself the types of rest you need beyond sleep. Tuning into your own experiences of body and mind will help you determine what is truly restful for you, and what isn't.

A quick example - I will often hear people express that after work they need what they'll refer to as "time to decompress", so they'll head to the couch or bed, do an award worthy belly flop and then scroll on social media in hopes of finding that one juicy post that makes the whole experience worthwhile. Is this *restful*? Does this offer stillness or space to actually decompress or relax? For most people I know, when they actually sit with and notice the felt experiences of these supposed decompression times, they find that they actually feel uncomfortable and tense while scrolling - especially because some part of them *knows* they have to get back up and make dinner or do laundry or whatever, but now they're locked into the addicting cycles of the internet and social media. When they finally do put the phone down, they tend to feel kinda gross and even more exhausted than before because they've just put their minds through a long scroll of rapid context shifts and algorithms designed to boost posts that incite anger or fear in order to keep us on these platforms.

Outside of the chaos of our phones and busy work lives, we also typically have some contact with other human beings which can be challenging in a variety of unique ways. Relationships can be tricky, communication with people who experience the world differently can be tricky. It can be easy to get caught up with patterns of ruminating thought concerning how we relate to others and express our needs and boundaries effectively. Without time to consciously and intentionally reflect on our interactions with others and with ourselves, these patterns of thought can also be quite captivating and can keep us locked in our minds.

On top of the phones and relationships in our lives, we also have dreams, goals, passions, hobbies, curiosities, etc. - all sorts of things that matter to us and we'd like to be able to focus on and move towards when possible. Without stillness, it can be easy to forget these things as the outer world piles things onto our already full plates. We can end up living as though we're NPC's, or disconnected robots on autopilot just going through the motions of our lives.

We deserve better. The good news is that through stillness we can offer ourselves a better quality of life without needing our external circumstances to change first.

One way to do that is through something called mindfulness and it's always accessible, no matter what's going on at any given moment.

Mindfulness in Daily Life

Mindfulness is essentially just the practice of noticing your current experience without judgment or resistance, but instead with kindness whenever possible. For example, right now, as you read this, your body is currently rippling with sensations and your mind is churning out thought after thought in response to the words you're reading (and many other discursive, potentially irrelevant thoughts), the sights and sounds around you, and the way your body is currently feeling. Are you aware of these experiences? If I were to ask you to name the top ten returning thoughts of your day today, do you think you'd be able to do it? If I asked you what sensations were most predominant in your current experience - could you name them? If I inquired into your current emotional state, do you have words to express emotions beyond angry, happy or sad?

I ask these questions not as a pop quiz that you've now either passed or failed (*you can have a star just for trying today*), but as an invitation to turn inward and actually *feel* the reality of this moment, right now. Not an analysis of it, but a felt sense of what's alive in your body and mind and an awareness of some of the causes and conditions leading to those feelings, thoughts and emotions.



Most of us were not taught how to connect with ourselves in these ways, especially without judgment, so please know that it's likely to be challenging for you at first to begin this process of tuning in to what's here and now, rather than living in a world of thoughts. This is ok and to be expected. Give yourself as much grace as you can possibly muster as you work to incorporate more kind awareness into your daily life.

In order to make these concepts more tangible, I'll be creating a number of guided practices for you to try out. Some would qualify more as mindful practices, others would be considered formal meditations, which we'll be getting to next. If you revisit the Diet section of this book, you'll also find a Mindful Eating practice detailed there.

We can be mindful when we're walking, when we're eating, when we're relieving ourselves of our super healthy dookies that formed as a result of our wonderfully fiber-rich diets, or when we're sitting on the couch chilling with friends. Whatever it is being done, it can be done with mindfulness.

Let's imagine you're brushing your teeth, as one small example. There ya are, standing in front of your mirror brushing your teeth and suddenly you remember, "*Ooh, I can do this mindfully!*". So you first become aware of your body. You feel how your feet are placed on the floor, and realize you're standing kind of awkwardly for no reason (this is actually me every time I brush my teeth - why do I stand like a drunken flamingo??) so you shift your body slightly and stand up a bit straighter. Ah, that feels better already. The body isn't so tense and tight anymore.

From here you notice you're gripping your toothbrush a bit aggressively so you relax your grip a bit. Now you're looking in the mirror, brushing your teeth and actually tuning into the feelings of

your body's positioning, your hand's grip, and the soothing feeling of the bristles massaging your gums and cleaning your teeth.

While you pay attention to these feelings and sensations, your mind starts poppin' off with some random thoughts about what you're going to make for dinner tomorrow, or about how frustrated you are with the way you handled something that day - and because you were practicing mindfulness, you *notice* this happening and say gently to yourself "*thinking*" and then return to your felt experience of brushing.

As you finish brushing, you feel your body as your hand reaches to rinse the brush and put it away. You stay tuned in to the feelings of your body as you head out of the bathroom, ready to dolphin-dive under your covers for some great rest. The experience of doing something as simple as brushing your teeth has turned into something that feels relaxing and expansive, something that feels more like stillness even though action was happening.

Imagine what it might feel like to experience more of your life in such a way. This is the potential and possibility afforded to you through these practices that can be used at any time, in any place.

Meditation is a mindfulness practice, but not all mindfulness practices are meditation.

Both are important and incredibly valuable in beginning to change your life from the inside out. The real change comes from us learning how to relate differently to the reality of our inner and outer experiences, not from us trying to forcefully shift our attitudes towards "positivity" or attempting to muscle our way through "getting our shit together".

Mindfulness and meditation are ancient, deep forms of practice and reflection, but they're not always presented that way. They can often be introduced in extremely diluted forms with promises of a "cure" for so-called "negative" feelings or experiences. The truth of the matter is, meditation can offer immense relief in a number of ways, but it doesn't come from avoiding our experiences, sugar-coating them, trying to pretend they're not that deep or attempting to just quickly explain everything away with a statement like "everything happens for a reason" - the relief comes from learning how to relate to our experiences with compassion and care. The waves are still going to exist, the highs and lows of life are present for everyone, and mindfulness and meditation can help us simply learn to surf those waves without getting toppled quite as often. It can also offer us tools to offer ourselves the care we deserve when we do get knocked over by an unexpected or especially large wave.

Meditation Basics

Basic mindfulness meditation, also known as Vipassana Meditation is a pretty straightforward practice. These practices have deep roots in Buddhism and other cultural traditions, and I want to honor that heritage while making them accessible to everyone. You can do a traditional formal meditation by sitting, standing, laying down or walking. I'll be sharing practices for each on my YouTube channel.

We start by establishing an anchor of some kind for our attention to rest on, typically something like the experience of our breath as it goes in and out of our bodies, or on a part of the body we can feel well, like the contact points between our butts and the chairs we're in, or the sensation of our feet on the floor.

We do our best to keep our attention focused on this feeling of breathing (without trying to change or alter the breath from however it's working in this moment) or the body, with the full understanding that **our minds will wander**. When they do, our practice is to simply become aware of the wandering and return to our anchor with kindness. No need to judge the mind for doing what minds do, just notice you got lost and then return. Every time you do this, it's like doing a push up and building your strength of focus and concentration.

That's it. Literally. Pay attention to *something*, on purpose, with kindness, and every time your mind wanders off and you become aware it has wandered, simply return to the initial object of your attention.

Wahoo, you're a meditator! Congrats! There are no good or bad meditations, no good or bad meditators. There is only the practice of awareness, wandering and returning.

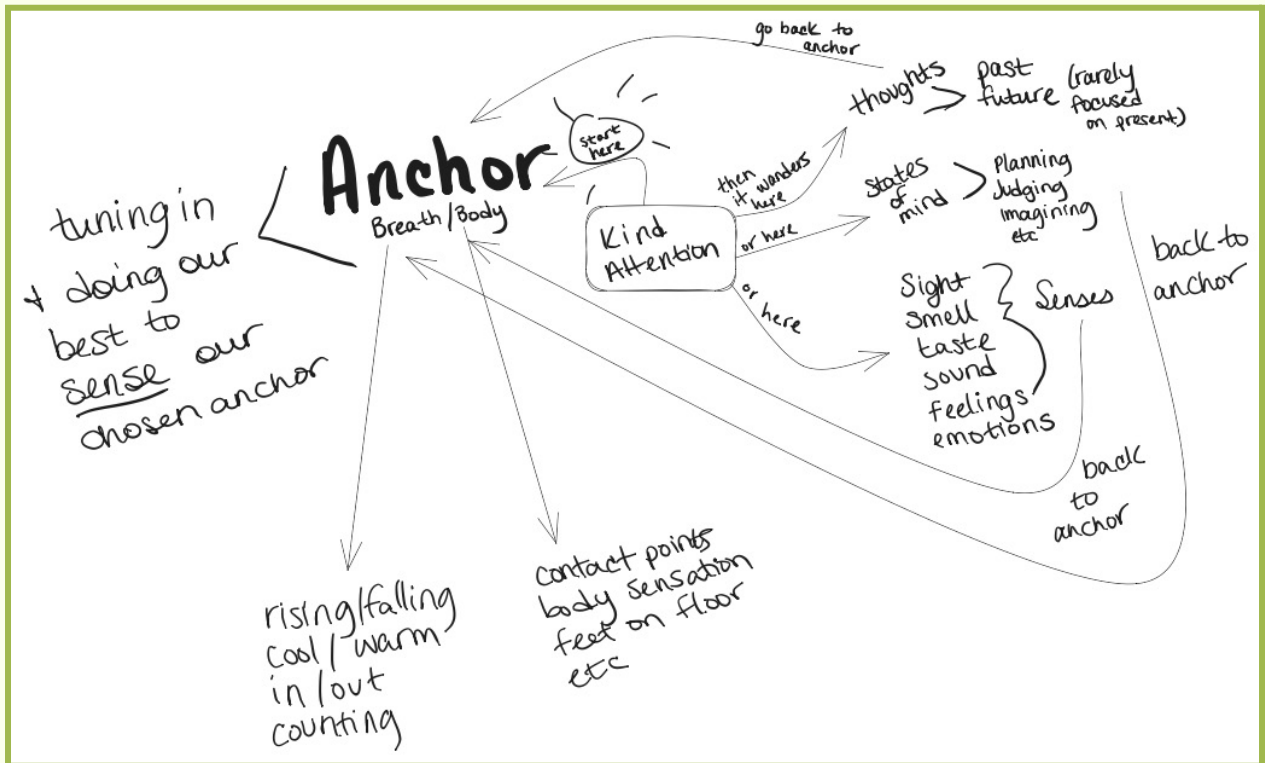
I've been meditating for I think around 8 years now, consistently, and some days I can meditate for 30 minutes and barely get caught up in thoughts. Other times, I can hardly sit still and find myself struggling to focus on my breath for more than a few moments at a time. This is ok. Your practice will vary based on the conditions of your life and mind, just notice when things are difficult in the same way you'd notice when things are going smoothly - with **kindness**.

I hope the importance and emphasis of the word "kindness" is making it through and sinking deep into your psyche as you explore these ideas. Our practices can really be quite impactful when we learn to drop the judgements and meet ourselves with kindness and grace. That also means, when you *notice* judgements arising, you meet *those* with kindness as well. Judgments are just another thought pattern you're likely to see regularly, they don't mean anything about you.

Our minds secrete thoughts like our mouths secrete saliva. They will just keep thinking and thinking day in and day out, without any constraints. If we've been taught to think in terms of judgements, we'll probably see a ton of them. We don't have to take them seriously though. Thoughts can be *real* but not *true*. The reality is, the judgemental thought has arisen, but is it true? Probably not. Release it and go back to focusing on your anchor.

During a meditation workshop I conducted last year, I created this incredibly ~artistic~ graphic to help remind folks of what our practice looks like with meditation. I hope it helps to drive these ideas home.

The Meditation Process



As you can see here, we start with the anchor. Some object of attention related to our breath or body.

We do our best to tune into it consistently by noticing the rising and falling of our belly or chest, noticing the cool air moving in through our nostrils and warm air going out, or even through counting the breaths up to 8 or so and then beginning the count again. While we're attending to this anchor, we are aiming to *feel* it from the inside out. Not just naming "rising, falling" as our bellies rise and fall, but to try to actually *feel* the rising and falling as they happen.

As we do this, our attention **will** wander.

- It'll wander off to thoughts, typically ones based in the past or future and rarely focused on the present. When they are focused on the present, it's often with a sense of "not enoughness" - essentially, they're focused on what's supposedly lacking from this moment.
- It'll wander off into various states of mind, like planning, imagining, judging, desiring, ruminating, etc.
- It'll wander off towards our senses, the things we're seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching (and our thoughts / judgments about those things) or towards our emotions and we may notice we're feeling agitated, anxious, sad or angry (or any other possible emotion)

As soon as we notice we've wandered off (regardless of how long we had wandered for), we simply **return**. That's it, go back to the anchor, go back to feeling and counting breaths or noticing the sensations of our feet on the ground.

Over time, these practices give us practice in staying with our actual experience, rather than just what we think about them. They allow us to live more fully because we feel safer experiencing the reality of our human existence, and our window of tolerance for feelings, emotions and experiences grows.

Journaling Practices

Another habit that can be incredibly supportive is journaling. In the Sleep section of this book, there was a suggestion for journaling before bed as a way to dump out all the clutter we've accumulated throughout the day as it can be a great way to avoid those racing thoughts we discussed.

Journaling doesn't just have to be a bedtime practice though, it can be a way to process your feelings and experiences throughout the day, or it can be a way to help plan or "script" out your day as it's beginning.

Sometimes I'll do a speedrun of the RAIN practice (available as a guided practice on my YouTube) to journal out my thoughts/feelings quickly when I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed and don't have much time to stop and process.

I'll pull up a note on my phone or in my journal app and write these words out, and then write what comes up for me in response to each prompt. This could be done within a couple minutes, or it can be done as a part of a longer introspective journaling session. It can be done to process something that's here right now, or for reflecting on something we experienced previously.

RAIN Journaling Practice

Recognize - *What am I feeling right now? Can I name any emotions present, or any sensations that are currently pulling my attention? Anger, tightness, tension, heaviness in chest, etc.*

Allow - *Here I'll write something like: "It's ok that I'm feeling x. I'm human, and humans have all kinds of feelings. Even if this one sucks right now, it's here, and it's ok."*

Investigate - *This is a space to write out how it feels in the body first, so I'll do a body scan and write out how that emotion I've Recognized is manifesting in the body with a bit more granularity. "I'm feeling this anger in my chest, it feels tight and twisty. I can notice my upper back is more contracted. My abdomen is tight and clenched. My brow is furrowed." The primary focus of this investigation is the felt sense of whatever is here first, from there we could also offer ourselves a question like "What am I believing right now?" - but we're not here to over analyze the mental*

aspect of this experience. Just to see what we might be buying into, and how it's impacting our bodies and minds.

Nurture - *This step is about showing ourselves the compassion we deserve in response to actually noticing what we're currently going through and the ways that it's hard and/or hurts. Self-compassion can be difficult for many of us, so if it's supportive, you might take the information from the previous 3 items and ask yourself "If a friend told me they were going through this right now, what would I offer them?", or "If I was younger and going through this and had the support I deserved, what might I hope they'd offer me at this moment?" Maybe it's a self-hug, maybe a hand over the heart, maybe some kind words to yourself like "I'm sorry this hurts so bad right now, I'm here for you." or "This is heavy and it's ok. I'm here for you and we've got this."*

The RAIN practice is a powerful one, and I've found it to be incredibly supportive of my needs many times in my life. I want to offer one quick thing to watch out for though - after you go through the Recognize and Allow portions of the practice, you may begin to feel a bit better. You may notice you're feeling a bit less overwhelmed and more grounded from just these first steps because they offer some distance from being overly identified with experience. Keep going anyway. Do the next steps - especially the final one. I noticed in my own practice over the years I would often do the first portion, feel some relief and be like "Ok, cool, I'm alright now I can get back to working on x." and skip the investigation and compassion steps. These are crucial steps for a number of reasons, and I hope you'll do the practice fully so you can see the ways these extra pieces impact your lives. Years of practice changed drastically for me when I began to prioritize self-compassion, and I would love for you to experience this for yourself as well.



Quick Wins

- Start with just ONE minute of paying attention to your breath when you wake up - that's it, just 60 seconds
- Use any wait times (elevator rides, waiting for your coffee to brew) as mini meditation moments
- Keep a notebook by your bed for a quick brain dump before sleep - get all those swirling thoughts out
- Try this "STOP" trick when stressed: Stop what you're doing, Take a breath, Observe how you feel, then Proceed
- Pick one daily activity (brushing teeth, showering) to practice being fully present - no phone, no planning, just being there and *feeling* it fully - you could even use the RAIN framework for exploring it regardless of whether the experience is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral



Recap

Your mind processes information all day long, and without stillness, all that mental activity shows up as racing thoughts at bedtime. Stillness isn't about achieving some perfect zen state - it's about giving your brain the downtime it desperately needs to digest everything you've fed it.

Mindfulness is simply noticing your current experience with kindness, whether you're brushing your teeth or sitting in meditation. Remember that thoughts are like saliva - your mind will keep producing them whether you pay attention or not, so don't take them too seriously. Meditation is just the practice of noticing when your mind wanders (which it absolutely will) and gently bringing it back to your chosen anchor. Even tiny moments of stillness throughout your day can reset your nervous system and help you surf life's waves instead of getting constantly knocked over by them. The goal isn't to stop thinking or feeling - it's to relate to your experiences with compassion instead of resistance.



Next Steps

Ready to add more stillness to your life? Start ridiculously, adorably small - just one minute of paying attention to your breath when you wake up, or using elevator rides as mini meditation moments. Pick one daily activity (like brushing your teeth or showering) to practice being fully present with - no phone, no planning, just feeling what's actually happening. Try the brain dump journaling before bed, especially if you're someone who gets hit with racing thoughts the moment your head hits the pillow. If you're curious about formal meditation, remember that "wandering and returning" is literally the practice - you're not failing when your mind goes off on tangents about what to make for dinner or about how you accidentally cut someone's finger with those cool grown-up scissors your Mom trusted you to bring to school in 3rd grade (just me?). Most importantly, approach all of this with the same kindness you'd show a good friend. Your mind and body have been working hard to keep you functioning, and they deserve your gentleness as you explore these new ways of being still.









What one small moment of stillness will you try adding to your day?

Conclusion: Putting It All Together

My hope is that as you reach the end of this eBook you're feeling more prepared to address some of the most important aspects of your health and wellness. S.H.A.D.E.S. has helped me and many of our friends and community members over the years, and this book was created to (hopefully) offer resources and suggestions that could assist you in making whatever adjustments are needed for you to feel more grounded and capable of showing up in your unique and beautiful life.

As a reminder, S.H.A.D.E.S. stands for:

-  ● **Sleep** - try your best to get that rest.
-  ● **Hydration** - keep that body *moist* and stay up on that HydroHomie lifestyle.
-  ● **Air** (getting outside) - try to trade screen time for green time whenever ya can.
-  ● **Diet** - mindfully prioritize the needs of your body without shame or judgment.
-  ● **Exercise** - shoot for 30 minutes total of physical activity to stay active and flexible.
-  ● **Stillness** (stuff like meditation, journaling, mindfulness) - can help your mind get the rest it deserves

Each of the sections, whether small or chonky, offered many possible ways to address some of the needs of your body and mind. Please don't feel like you must implement all things and course correct every letter of S.H.A.D.E.S. immediately. Starting small and paying mindful attention to how your body and mind respond to changes can be incredibly beneficial.

We're aiming for 80/20 just as a general guideline, not a rigid rule. Even the 80/20 was just another fun (to me) way of saying "try to prioritize health and wellness as often as you can while still giving yourself time to fuck around and enjoy things that aren't just about nutrition or health improvement because life is too short to be stuck in a land of hard rules and restrictions." Try not to get too hung up on any of the suggestions that may have included guidance like that, your life is yours alone and you get to decide what balance feels like for you.

I'd like to offer a final thank you for taking the time to read this book, and to also offer you a bit of affirmation before you move to whatever comes next in your day.

You are a beautiful human being. You are worthy of love, care and understanding. You deserve to be fully seen and heard, so please start by fully seeing and hearing yourself with mindful attention and love. You are enough, as you are in this moment. These suggestions are simply there to help you potentially increase the moments where you feel well enough and ready to show up as your incredible, authentic and ever-changing self. Growth is a natural result of your humanity and power, it's not something needed as a result of some deficiency or shortcoming. You are enough. You are enough. **You are enough.**

Thank you and may your day be filled with joy, care and incredibly delicious snacks.

May you all be well.